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A

TOUCH AT THE TIMES;

A Comedy,

IN FIVE ACTS,

AS

PERFORMED AT THE THEATRE ROYAL,

COVENT-GARDEN.

By ROBERT FRANCIS JAMESON, Esq.

OF THE INNER TEMPLE.

"After this manner do both sexes deceive themselves and bring reflexions and disgrace upon the most happy and most honorable state of life; whereas if they would but correct their depraved taste, moderate their ambition, and place their happiness upon proper objects, we should not find felicity in the marriage state such a wonder in the world as it now is."—*Spectator, No.* 268.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR C. CHAPPLE, 66, PALL-MALL.

1812.

Price 2*s.* 6*d.*

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Printed by Cox and Baylis, Great Queen Street,
Lincoln's-Inn-Fields.

PREFACE.

CUSTOM has established forms of literary politeness, which all authors are expected to conform to; and, as it is reasonable that they should appear equally well-bred on a sheet of paper as on a Turkey carpet, I consider it incumbent on me, before the reader and I sit down together, to make a prefatory bow and pay my compliments. To say the truth, I feel so perfectly conscious of the danger I incur, by submitting the following Comedy, deprived of the aids of action, to the public, that I gladly avail myself of this plausible detention of my readers, in order to endeavor to ingratiate myself with them before they discover my failings. Candour is ever found conducive to favorable sentiments; but, lest the exercise of it with an interested view may detract from its merit, I will set the scale even by an ingenuous acknowledgement, that I should not be so ready to evince it, if I had not a hope of its influence. When I declare that I consider this performance as a slight thing, very incapable of bearing the test of closet criticism, I trust my modesty will be duly credited, and not placed to the account-current of authorship, in which *art* I profess myself a novice; a confession, no doubt, that will be thought superabundant. Nothing will more clearly prove the sincerity of my declaration, than a reference to the production of this play, which, contrary to the friendly remonstrances of the proprietors, I persisted in urging forward, at a period very unfavorable to new performances. But, having saga-

ciously noted, that Englishmen are generally in better humour in July than November, I thought it more prudent to commit myself to their mercy while the sun was in *Leo*, than to wait till the chilling fogs of winter disposed them to be as much out of humour with others as themselves.

Notwithstanding the slightness of my plot, and my deficiency in scenic knowledge, the public have been pleased to receive the piece with approbation. To abridge my egotism, I shall request *Quintillian* to account for my success (I will risk the imputation of pedantry for the gratification of reminding those querulous critics, who affirm the drama has made a retrograde progress, that there were bad plays in days of yore)—"Sunt actores," says he, "qui et optimis poetarum tantum adjiciunt gratiæ ut "nos infinitè magis eadem illa audita quam lecta delec- "tent, et vilissimis etiam quibusdam impetrent aures, "ut quibus nullus est in bibliothecis locus, sit etiam fre- "quens in theatris:" which I beg leave to translate, "for the benefit of country gentlemen," and those of the fair sex who are not disciples of Mrs. More: "There are performers on the stage who add so many graces to the best pieces, that they afford us far more delight in representation, than in the closet; and who give such effect, even to the poorest, that what would not be admitted into the library, will be well received at the theatre."*

* I am naturally led here to notice the performers who filled up my meagre sketches of character with so much effect. I feel the more obliged to them for their exertions, since the period in which this play was brought on the stage was a very unusual one for them to be called upon. I can also fully appreciate the polite and obliging readiness with which they came forward to serve me with their talents, in parts, which, in several instances, are far below the powers of those who filled them. I beg they will accept my warmest acknowledgements for the very effectual support they afforded me.

Having brought my comedy on the stage, every one must doubtless admire my *public spirit* in thus resigning it to be cut up and dissected by those literary surgeons, the critics, for the benefit of those unfortunate persons, who may hereafter be afflicted with "*cacoëthes scribendi.*" I am afraid, however, that this kind of philanthropy has become too common for any peculiar merit to be attached to it. There are so many *literary Curtii*, who daily throw themselves into the gulph of oblivion, that the act is regarded with indifference; nor could I expect, with my light piece, to make splash enough to draw attention. We are, perhaps, too generally inclined to conceive ourselves the objects of notice, just as in a portrait gallery *each* spectator thinks the pictures are gazing *at him.* But I am falling into the extreme, and becoming vain of my humility.

Before I conclude, I must be allowed to notice a very unfair criticism which appeared in *one* of the daily papers. I am disposed to listen calmly and with due deference to remarks on the *literary* character of my play, but with respect to its *moral*, I will stand up boldly in the maintenance of its purity. That there are such characters as *Beaumont*, is too notorious; and if my humble effort adds to their odium, I shall have abundant reason to be satisfied; for I confess I do not perceive how the holding up vice to indignation is a violation of decorum. I am unconscious of any expression or idea offensive to virtue, and I think I may venture to assume some degree of merit, in treating the subject I have chosen with verbal propriety. The sagacious critic to whom I allude, is extremely indignant at my not *punishing the lady.* I know not what sort of justice it would be to do so;—I am sure it would not be *poetic.* Levity is the utmost she can be charged with; which, though almost criminal in the conjugal

relation, by the laws of the drama, has always been considered venial. For my part, I am a young man, and all the critics in the universe shall not compel me to a breach of gallantry.

If e'er m lines, to eke a paltry jest,
Should swell with honest scorn a female breast,
For me may no soft bosom ever heave,
In life to sympathize, in death to grieve.
Whene'er I sigh, with am'rous anguish torn,
May all the warmth of love raise equal scorn;
Whate'er my destiny,—where'er I roam,
Cold be life's charities, and sad my home.
May no fond tie,—no tender hope console
The hours of absence, as they slowly roll;
No dimpled cheek a smiling welcome give,—
Unheeded may I die,—unfriended live!
I scorn the wit, which, with unhallow'd flame,
Throws on the modest cheek the gleam of shame.
Contemn'd be those, "with fascinating art,
Who lure the fancy to corrupt the heart;"
And treat the finer feelings of the breast—
Love's chaste emotions—as an idle jest.
Solace of life! whose magic influence pours
A beam of radiance on our darkest hours!
When clouds hang heavy and obscure life's day,
The torch of Hymen cheers the gloomy way;
Gleams through the storm, and points a place of rest,
In the sweet refuge of a faithful breast.

R. F. J.

July 8, 1812.

PROLOGUE.

SPOKEN BY MR. BRUNTON.

Well may sententious moralists complain,
How blind, how weak are mortals, and how vain
Each day, each place, by trite examples show it—
We've got one here to-night—a new fledg'd poet.
Headstrong, in one sense, authors will take flight—
They think they can't *do wrong* when they *do write*;
Lur'd by the old birds singing, up they spring—
When, whiz! the critics hit them on the wing.
Alas! poor bards! how hapless is their lot,
Who cannot *rise* for fear of being shot!
No wonder, then, that modern poets go,
As critics all protest, so very *low.*
Cook'd *à la mode,* to table they are sent,
Pepper'd with puns and stuff'd with sentiment;
Yet, after all, howe'er well drest we bring'em,
Some hungry people swear there's nothing in'em.
Others, again, exclaim at the whole bevy—
They can't digest'em—hang'em they're too heavy;
In short, to please all palates is not easy—
Your critics' stomachs are so devilish queasy.
T'was but the other day I chanced to meet
A *magnus Aristarchus* in the street,
"Pray Sir"—says he—"what trash is this you've got—
"One of your hodge-podge pieces, is it not;
"Where people in hysterics keep a pother,
"Laughing with one eye, crying with the other?"—
"No, Sir,"—said I—"'tis strictly comic"—"Poh!—
"A five act farce—ay! ay!—I thought it so."
"Sir—'tis a first fruit"—"Ay! like all I've seen—
"We either have it rotten or too green."
"Faith, Sir!"—cried I—"I hope you have no spite—
"What, do you think the moderns cannot write?"
"No, pardon me,"—cries he—"I know it well—
"Yes, they can write, and, some of them, can——*spell*;
"Yes, they can write, no doubt of that, *ifags!*
"Witness alone the great demand for rags.
"And let them write, poor devils, soon they'll see
"'Tis vain to dream of immortality.
"They hope for mercy, but their faith wo'nt save'em,
"D——d they will be—the pastry-cook will have'em—
"Spite of the vanity that in them lurks,
"They'll find there is no merit in DEAD WORKS.
"No, Sir, believe me, in this age of dross,
"To look for wit or taste is vain—that's *pos.*"—
Half chok'd with scorn, I cried out—"Oh! you Vandal!
"Pray in what age was wrote the *School for Scandal*—

PROLOGUE.

" When was——" but stop ! what face is that I see ?
Ah ! are you there, Sir ?—Gentlemen, 'tis he—
Yonder he sits with self-importance big ;
Not like your ancients' sages in a wig,
For critics now so sparing are of hair,
To find it on their *chins* is somewhat rare.
No doubt some brother snarls are come with this in,
If so, you'll quickly know them—by their hissing.
For you, ye jovial souls, on high who sit,
You will not damn a man for wanting wit,
While the vast mass of face that fills the floor,
Where a *broad grin* extends from door to door,
Shows what good-humoured folks are cramm'd together,
With hearts as mild and cheerful as the weather.
Be pleas'd as nature prompts, nor let cold art
Dictate a rule of feeling to the heart.
Check not with critic skill your merry vein,
Then our light scenes may chance to entertain.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Sir Charles Wilding	Mr. Jones.
Beaumont	Mr. Barrymore.
Lovel	Mr. Brunton.
Canker	Mr. Emery.
Clinch	Mr. Simmons.
Flaw	Mr. Blanchard.
Serge	Mr. Fawcett.

Mrs. Beaumont	Mrs. Egerton.
Melissa	Mrs. H. Johnston.
Laura	Miss Booth.
Flutter	Mrs. Gibbs.

Servants, &c.

Scene—London.

A TOUCH AT THE TIMES.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*An Apartment in Canker's House.*

Enter CANKER *and* MELISSA.

Mel. Nay but, my dear, sweet, obliging, good-natur'd guardy—

Can. Silence, I tell you; I'm not in a humour to be teazed.

Mel. Shall I run for your anti-bilious drops?

Can. Zounds! don't pester me—I won't be haunted thus.

Mel. Well—I'm glad to hear that, for you have been haunted a long time by a most terrible spirit. Come, come, my good guardy, you can't think how a smile would become you. Pray, give your muscles a little exercise—unscrew your lips, raise your eye-brows an inch or so—

Can. Let me go, let me go, I say.

Mel. Nay, I'll argue like a coffee-house politician, and if I can't detain you by the strength of my eloquence, I will by the strength of your button-holes.

Can. Zounds! I say, let me go. Must I be continually baited with your confounded clack, you forward minx you? My cursed goodnature has brought me to this; I must turn guardian, with a

plague, a keeper of wild beasts. Well, half my trouble is now at an end, for that rake, your brother, has broke loose, and sets off this morning on his journey to the devil.

Mel. Lord! guardy, what do you mean?

Can. The puppy comes of age to day. He has calculated his nativity to a second, and I expect him from Oxford every minute. But let him do as he will; he can't blame me. I've given him the best education in the kingdom, such as it is. Ah! things are not as they were formerly— the age has come to a pretty pass;—there are no men now-a-days.

Mel. You forget, guardy, you are still alive. I hope, for my sake, you'll leave another phœnix behind you.

Can. You jade, you, you're a notable housewife, you can cater for yourself! Ay! ay! I should have had you going off with that impertinent puppy Lovel, if I had not been careful. One would need be quicksighted in these times. I'm too indulgent, that's the truth; I intend to provide a husband for you, that's a fool, in order to save you the trouble of making him one.

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. Sir, here's Mr. Lovel.

Mel. Lovel!

Can. How, Sirrah! didn't I order you never to admit that fellow again.

Serv. Yes, Sir, but he insisted.

Enter LOVEL.

Can. Insisted! what, force my doors! storm an Englishman's castle! Sir, your most obedient, very

humble servant; will you allow me the liberty of asking, whether you are come to cut my throat, or merely to rob the house?

Lov. Sir, I beg you will be perfectly easy as to yourself; but with regard to your house, I freely confess I am disposed to rob it of its chief ornament.

Can. So, so, polite and explicit; quite in the French style.

Mel. [*Aside.*] What would the man be at?

Lov. Sir, it is you who have forced me to this rudeness. Could you expect me tamely to submit to your arbitrary decrees. Do you think tyrannically to usurp dominion over the heart, and sway its feelings at your pleasure? Let me tell you, Mr. Canker, mine is not of so docile a nature.

Mel. [*Aside.*] Is the man mad?

Can. I shall have them run off before my face.

Lov. Not, Sir, that I arrogate to myself any right, or vainly pretend a claim either to Miss Wilding's favour, or to yours—No, Sir, I ask only to be viewed in the light I merit, as an honorable suitor; at least, I trust, in point of family and fortune, unexceptionable: and think myself entitled to demand for this lady (who is of age and judgment sufficient to use her discretion in the choice of a protector) that freedom which is her due.

Mel. Hem! hem! I think it is high time I should speak.

Lov. Yes, my charming girl, speak, and bless me.

Can. Humph!

Mel. Upon my word, Sir, you have a vast deal of assurance.

Can. That's a compliment now-a-days.

Lov. Nay, prythee, Melissa, for once be serious. If you are still determined to continue teazing me,

at least become properly qualified, as other women are, by matrimony. I have long profess'd an ardent and honorable passion; you have hitherto favor'd it, and assured me, nothing but your guardian's consent was wanting to complete my happiness.

Can. Well, come, that's as it should be.

Mel. *(aside.)* His folly will spoil all.

Lov. Sir, I am now come to lay my fortune at your disposal; do what you please with it; make what arrangements you think fit—I shall consider this hand as a full compensation.

Can. Sir, I think it strange you can't take my word. I have told you fifty times already, you shan't have the girl,—no, Sir, nor see her either. You are too much of a rake, like the other puppies of the age. Besides, I hear you pretend to be a wit, and that's an unnatural character now-a-days.

Mel. And do you think, Sir, I could possibly countenance any one, who has behaved so unpardonably to my worthy guardian?

Lov. Provoking girl!

Can. Eh! eh! what does she say?

Mel. I suppose I am not to have a will of my own either? I am to have gentlemen bolt into the house whenever they please, and carry me off, whether I will, or no.

Can. Ay! ay! he has done for himself.

Lov. Was there ever such a woman! Melissa, consider the importance of this moment; can you.....

Mel. Stand off, Sir, if you please.

Can. Ay! ay! stand off, if you please.

Lov. S'death! is this the way I am treated!

Can. You are treated better than you deserve, considering what sort of a guest you are.

Mel. Guardy, I don't like his looks.

Lov. Death and the devil!

Mel. Oh! Lord! do but hear him!

Can. I'll have him thrown out of the window; —hear, John! Thomas!

Lov. Sir, I will save you that trouble. Madam, your servant: I am too proud to be the slave of coquetry. [*Exit.*

Can. Ay! ay! he'd rather be prime minister to the devil.—I'll see him fairly out of the house, an impudent dog! [*Exit.*

Mel. Oh lud! oh lud! the man must be a fool. Could he not see I had no other way to carry it off? The deuce is in it, the men will always take one at one's word.

Enter LAURA.

Lau. Bless me! Melissa, what has put my uncle into such a passion?

Mel. Nothing, my dear, but an impudent dog, who ran up stairs out of the street; so guardy's been driving him out again.

Lau. Surely I heard Mr. Lovel's voice.

Mel. Yes; he was here too.

Lau. Upon my word, Melissa, you treat that poor young man in a shocking way.

Mel. Ha! ha! poor thing, you are full of nothing but sympathy and sensibility. Well, I have been teazing guardy to let us go to the masquerade to night, but he won't give his consent, so we must go without it.

Lau. Indeed, Melissa, it would be highly improper. You have observed Mr. Beaumont's manner to me. His unpardonable conduct renders it impossible for me to go to his house.

Mel. Unpardonable! how?

Lau. He has made downright love to me.

Mel. Ha! ha! was there ever such a queer creature! unpardonable for making love! Lord! what a wicked fellow!

Lau. I don't see any thing to laugh at—you know he's a married man.

Mel. And thinks you prettier than his wife. You surely don't expect he should be in love with her? Love, my dear, is but a mere master of the ceremonies, who introduces people to each other, to dance thro' life, and, having brought them together, makes his bow, and skips away.

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. Mrs. Beaumont, Madam. [*Exit.*

Enter MRS. BEAUMONT.

Mel. Your servant, Madam; you come very apropos, for we were just talking of you.

Mrs. B. Pray, my dear, don't let me interrupt you. I long prodigiously to hear my own character; for I'm so unfortunate, I can never learn it but at second-hand.

Mel. Oh! Madam, excuse me; I can't think of putting your modesty to the blush.

Mrs. B. Modesty and blushes! pray, where did you pick up these old-fashioned phrases? Why, my dear, if a blush should be seen on the cheek of a woman of fashion, it would be thought a new invention, and every one would enquire for her perfumer.

Lau. Then, want of modesty seems the only point fashion keeps constant to.

Mrs. B. Bless me, little graveairs, are you there? I protest you quite startled me with your antediluvian sentiment.

Mel. For my part, I think it greatly to the credit of people of fashion to be always varying, for it shews they are conscious of their own defects, when they change their *minds* so often.

Mrs. B. Oh! lud! both on me at once! upon my word, you have been caged too long. I must take you under my matronly care for a winter or two.—As to you [*To Laura*], you wicked creature, I believe you have taken to bad practices, and begun picking breasts; for I am sure you have stolen my *caro sposo's* heart from his.

Lau. There, Madam, you are certainly wrong; for how could I take from your husband what is in your possession?

Mrs. B. More barbarism! I suppose you think things are now as in days of yore, when every wife kept the keys and her husband's heart as snugly as her pots of preserves.

Mel. I declare, Laura, I am quite asham'd of your ignorance. Fashionable anatomy allows no heart, 'tis only found in vulgar breasts. The ton have but nervous affections, and never shew any symptoms of sensibility, but at the sight of a spider, or the escalade of an earwig.

Mrs. B. Ha! ha! you are a wild thing—pray, rattle on. But, indeed, I'm forgetting I have fifty things to do before dinner, and I came to let you into a prodigious secret. If we talk of stealing hearts, I think I may be vain. Pray, read this.

Mel. Why, this is guardy's hand.

Mrs. B. Something like it, I believe.

Mel. [*reads*] "If the fairest of her sex has "compassion equal to her beauty, she will, in "addition to the character she intends assuming at "the masquerade to-night, wear a red rose in her "bosom, that she may be distinguished by a dying—

"Franciscan Friar" — Ha! ha! bravo, guardy! This is admirable!

"Thus, on a starry night, fond children cry
For the rich spangles that adorn the sky."

Well, pray, what do you intend to do—to kill him with kindness, or cruelty?

Mrs. B. That weighty matter is yet undetermined.

Lau I hope, Madam, you will save him from the ridicule, which the knowledge of his folly would bring on him.

Mrs. B. Upon my word, my dear, I don't see any thing so foolish in it, either. 'Tis excusable enough; the man's in love with me, that's all.

Mel. I have a scheme in my head; will you resign the enamour'd swain to me?

Mrs. B. Take him with all my heart.

Mel. Thank you with all mine, you can afford to be generous in this way.

Mrs. B. Sly creature! well, manage it as you please. I protest, I have prattled away my time—I must fly home, for I expect the milliner with my masquerade dress — I'm a fickle being, and have chosen the moon. Oh! stop, stop!—give me my billets-doux—I file them as regularly as a tradesman his bills, and 'tis the pleasantest amusement in the world, to turn them over in a dull hour. Apropos, my dear, I hear your brother, Sir Charles, is expected. I am in love with him already by description; so, remember, I engage him in my train—Your servant, my dears. [*Exit.*

Mel. Your servant, Madam. Ha! ha! well, who could have thought this?

Lau. I wonder, Melissa, you take such pleasure in her society. There is a levity in her manner, that is far from being pleasing.

Mel. Your ignorance of the world makes you think so.

Lau. Well, I think—

Mel. But, can't you think without looking so serious? I don't wonder at fashionable people never thinking; for, to say the truth, it makes one look horribly plain.

Enter FLUTTER.

Well, Flutter, what news?

Flut. Lard, ladies, who do you think is in town?

Mel. A great many knaves, and twice as many fools.

Flut. Lord! mem, why Sir Charles's Mr. Fangle, mem, is below, and says Sir Charles will be here in a jiffy. Lard! mem, you'd be surprised to see how well Mr. Fangle looks.

Mel. Well, child, go, get my things for dressing; and, for fear of mistakes, I forbid you thinking of Mr. Fangle for the next half-hour.

Flut. He! he! mem, you are pleased to be merry. [*Exit.*

Mel. Bless me, Laura, how pale you are of a sudden! What's the matter with you?

Lau. Nothing—nothing.

Mel. Poor dear! let me feel your pulse.—Nay, trust to my skill—Hem!—one—two—three—So, Sir Charles—ten—eighteen—twenty-five—Bless me, how it gallops! My dear, you are in a high fever.

Lau. You are always so ridiculous, Melissa.

Mel. Ah! this comes of novels, and sentimental comedies, where two poor creatures, after languishing into consumptions, when each has a foot in the grave, at last join hands to help themselves out again.

Sir Charles. *(Without)* Fangle, order the carriage, d'ye hear?

Mel. Here he is.

Enter SIR CHARLES WILDING.

Sir Chas. Ah! my dear creatures, your most humble footstool. (*To Mel.*) Is your colour proof, child? (*Kisses her.*)

Mel. Psha! you don't know the danger of that custom. You may be hanged some day for stealing.

Sir Chas. (*To Laura.*) My sweet little friend, I shall 'scape hanging with you, and only be *transported.* Bless me, do you follow nature so closely, as to have no roses in winter?

Mel. Ah! Charles—"she let concealment, "like a....."

Lau. Fie, Melissa! I need not tell you, Sir Charles, she is as much a rattle as ever.

Sir Chas. So much the worse for poor Lovel.

Mel. What, has he been whining to you? I hope he will go down to his old gothic rookery, and tell his mammy.

Sir Chas. Upon my soul, you wrong him. But, you women are so fond of fools, a man of sense has no chance with you.

Mel. No, no; 'tis your men of sense that treat us like fools; and as we hear nothing but nonsense on all sides, we very wisely prefer those who deliver it most naturally, and with a better grace. If men of sense will use the language of folly, they must expect to be outdone by those who have it for their mother tongue.

Sir Chas. Faith, I believe you are right there; but what says my pretty Mrs. Mum?

Lau. I—I—beg your pardon, Sir Charles—I—didn't exactly—

Mel. Do you remember the song, my dear,—
" Absence is no cure for love."

Sir Chas. Love! Oh! oh! sits the wind in that quarter! And pray, my dear creature, what happy fellow?

Mel. Fie, fie, Charles! We, good Protestants, allow no inquisitors.

Sir Chas. Ay! ay!

" Good Protestants you are, to Church so true,
" You make e'en assignations in a pew."

But faith, poor Laura looks so sombre, her piteous face makes a very woman of me—I have the *curiosity* of a whole *coterie.*

Lau. I congratulate you, Sir Charles, on your excellent spirits.

Sir Chas. I wish, my dear girl, I cou'd return the compliment. Some sad dog has robb'd you of as pretty a complexion as one would wish to see on a summer's day.

Lau. You have been studying flattery at Oxford, I suppose, Sir, and play upon me to keep your tongue in practice.

Mel. I've not heard such a long speech from her these three months.

Lau. Ha! ha! pray amuse yourselves; but, indeed, I am no match for you.

Mel. Not for me, my dear; but you know you may be for Sir Charles.

Lau. You are really extremely ridiculous, Melissa.

Mel. Ha! ha! now you shall judge, Charles, if I have not good reason for thinking she is in love.

Sir Chas. Well.

Lau. Melissa, I beg you will not go on in this foolish way.

Sir Chas. No, no; I positively insist upon hearing it.

Mel. Why, then, you must know, ever since—

Lau. Indeed, Sir Charles, she is only jesting. Pray don't listen to her.

Sir Chas. Oh! if it be a jest, I'm determin'd to have it, for I like a jest above all things.

Mel. Well, then, ever since—

Lau. Dearest Melissa, if you love me, no more of this.

Sir Chas. Come, come, no tampering. Go on, mistress.

Mel. You see he forces me—So then, ever since—

Lau. This is cruel of you, Melissa. Indeed, Sir Charles, if you—that is, if I—I mean if—pray, excuse me. [*Exit.*

Sir Chas. By heaven! she is in tears! this is strange!

Mel. Not in the least; a very common case. Love, mere love, which causes us to languish like sun-flowers on a cloudy day—we are feeble plants, and a dew-drop will bend us.

Sir Chas. Poor thing!

Mel. Do you pity her?

Sir Chas. I do, upon my soul, most heartily.

Mel. And upon mine, so do I sincerely; but I can't help teazing her a little, because she stands out so stubbornly against conviction.

Sir Chas. But, who is the swain that has caused all this, and why the deuce does he not, if he can't get out old Bruin's consent, bid her bundle up her knicknacks, and throw herself after them out of the window?

Mel. Ay! why indeed! and I'll give you a wherefore. He's stupid enough not to perceive he is the object of her passion.

Sir Chas. Then, take my word for it, the fellow is an ass.

Mel. Ha! ha! do you think so, my learned brother? Well, I must go, and comfort the poor thing—I'll tell her you pity her, ha! ha! ha!

Sir Chas. What the devil are you laughing at?

Mel. Ha! ha! your servant, most sagacious Sir, your servant, ha! ha! [*Exit.*

Sir Chas. At her old tricks, I see. Well, here I am in town again, the dear delightful, rattling town. Egad, I think I have had enough of the Muses. I never liked learned ladies, and always thought a pretty girl, who could but read eyes, and scratch billets-doux, the more preferable society. But I'm trifling here, when I've as much business on my hands as a coroner in November. I have been loading these many years, and had a damn'd deal of dry wadding cramm'd into me. Law has drawn back the catchlock, nature inclines me to fire—so, off I go. [*Exit.*

SCENE II.—*An Apartment in Beaumont's House.*

Enter Mr. and Mrs. BEAUMONT, *meeting.*

Beau. Ha! your most obedient, Madam. This is an unexpected pleasure indeed.

Mrs. B. Unexpected, no doubt, Mr. Beaumont. You seem prodigiously disconcerted at this little accident. Pray, sit down, and compose yourself; for since fortune has thus kidnapp'd us into a tête-à-tête, we may as well gratify her in her whim, for the sake of novelty.

Beau. With all my heart, Madam; for to confess a truth, I have been plotting how to bring about this very event.

Mrs. B. Indeed! Here is something truly wonderful. I'm on the very tiptoe of expectation, but

being tired of the posture, reach me a chair, you uncivil creature. So,—very gallant;—and now proceed audibly, and distinctly.

Beau. Pshaw! a truce to this trifling. We play the fool enough in public; besides, I have something of importance to say.

Mrs. B. Then I move an adjournment; for now you mention something of importance, I remember I have to attend a private committee at Lady Fiddlefaddle's.

Beau. Punctuality is unfashionable — We are alone, I believe. In short, Madam, I cannot longer conceal from you what the world will quickly know —I am a ruined man.

Mrs. B. Sir!

Beau. Yes, Madam; and however indifferent you may be, as to what generally concerns me, I believe I shall have your sympathy now.

Mrs. B. It ill becomes you, Sir, to charge me with an indifference you can best account for. Lured by my gold you ensnared me into this fatal union—You drove my friends from me that you might pamper, undisturbed, on the wealth I brought you, and now, after a few years of extravagance and neglect, you tell me you are ruined.

Beau. Faith, Madam, I should have great pleasure in telling you the contrary.

Mrs. B. Barbarous, unfeeling man! To what am I reduced! Oh! that I could retrace the fatal steps I have taken,—that I had listen'd to those, who forewarn'd me of the ruin I have drawn upon myself.

Beau. "These are the charming agonies of love!"

Mrs. B. Ruined, did you say?

Beau. On the very verge of it. Last night I lost a sum beyond my power to pay. Till that is

settled, I cannot draw upon fortune. Tradesmen are urgent—difficulties are daily closing on me, and unless I can speedily raise a round sum, we must sink at once.

Mrs. B. And must I be sacrificed to your extravagance? Am I to suffer for your dissolute and unprincipled conduct?

Beau. Charming! charming! What a lovely vermillion! What enchanting attitudes! My dear Madam, whenever you would kill any one completely, put yourself in a passion.

Mrs. B. Grant me patience! But I deserve it all for putting myself in the power of such a monster.

Beau. Come, come, Madam, this ranting is ridiculous. Let us remember, however our hearts may be, our interests are united. My affairs are disordered, 'tis true, but not beyond the possibility of retrieval—That is in your power.

Mrs. B. Mine!

Beau. Yes. There is a plain, blunt, rich uncle of yours—nay, keep your temper;—recollect, we are standing, bound together, on the brink of a precipice, if I fall I drag you with me.

Mrs. B. And what then? can I be worse? can I be precipitated into greater misery than your barbarity entails on me?

Beau. Well, Madam, all I now do, is to give you warning, that you may prepare for the taunts and neglect of the world which await you, and bid adieu to the gaieties that surround you.

Mrs. B. And if I should save you from impending ruin, what more do I do than purchase a temporary smile, and the suspension of another hour like this?

Beau. Try it; I am not accustomed to professions, and I suspect you would give me little credit for them.

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. My Lady Fiddlefaddle, Madam, requests to know if she shall have the pleasure of seeing you.

Mrs. B. I cannot see, or be seen by any one; deny me to all.

Beau. Stay, Sir.—I thought, Madam, you had more sense, and had known the world better. Your mistress will wait on her ladyship: order the chariot to the door. [*Exit Servant.* Would you publish your misfortunes and accelerate your fall? Be even gayer than ever; let not surmise draw credit from a look.—The storm may yet pass over.

Mrs. B. Why did I ever listen to that deceitful tongue? Well, Sir, I will write to my uncle, Mr. Serge, though I much doubt whether it will be effectual. But I must first insist on your making a provision for me, that may save me from the recurrence of such circumstances.

Beau. To that I willingly agree. I think, Madam, as you see masks to-night, it would be better to meet Mr. Serge to-morrow. You know his unpolished manners and vulgar prejudices, and must be careful how you offend them.

Mrs. B. The hint comes with peculiar propriety from you, Sir. I perceive experience is the tutor of fools, and the best way to obtain good behaviour from a husband, is to bind him over to it. [*Exit.*

Beau. Silly creature! Ha! what has she dropt? [*Takes up a paper.*

[*Reads*] "If the fairest of her sex—compas-"sion—um—um—beauty—masquerade to-night—"a Franciscan Friar."—So, so, Madam, have I caught you! This may be worth attending to.

Money must be raised in some way, and faith 'twould be no bad thing if a rich fool and liberal jury would lend me their assistance. In the scale of misfortune, gold is ever considered an equipoise, and I assess my feelings so highly, that I have little doubt, by proper management, a disaster of this kind might make me easy for life. [*Exit.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*The Street.*

Enter Sir CHARLES *and Mrs.* BEAUMONT.

Sir Chas. Pray, Madam, step aside here out of the crowd. I fear your chariot is too much damaged to proceed: but I trust you have received no injury from this unfortunate accident.

Mrs. B. Oh! Sir, nothing but a fright. I thank you for your polite attention. I beg I may not trouble your further.

Sir Chas. Ah! Madam! would this were the least trouble you were doom'd to give me.

Mrs. B. La! where can my servants be?

Sir Chas. Here, Madam, is one (*bowing*)—if you deign to accept his services.

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. Madam, my Lady Shophunter has just drove up, and begs you will take a seat in her carriage.

Mrs. B. Extremely fortunate! I thank her Ladyship. Sir, I am greatly indebted to you, for your politeness. I must insist on not troubling you further. Not a step, upon my word.

Sir Chas. Pardon me, Madam, I feel myself compelled to disobey you. [*Exeunt.*

Enter LOVEL.

Lov. S'death! what a fool am I, to think longer

of the girl. And yet, for the life of me, I cannot persuade my legs to carry me out of the sight of her dwelling. Oh! love! love! thou dost, indeed, lead reason captive.

Re-enter Sir CHARLES.

Sir Chas. A charming creature, upon my soul! I wish I could have got hold of her name. Hey! what, Lovel,—is it you?

Lov. Your servant, Sir Charles.

Sir Chas. What the devil's the matter with him. How d'ye do, Ned?

Lov. Indisposed.

Sir Chas. Ay! the weather is heavy. Pray, is there any thing new to-day?

Lov. Psha! nonsense!

Sir Chas. Nay, nonsense is no novelty I'm sure; and as to your psha, Sir, I'm an Englishman, and not to be pshawed out of my manners and customs. Health, news, and the weather are——

Lov. Be so good as to step into the next milliner's shop, if you must be prating, and are so full of folly;—don't run over upon me.

Sir Chas. Heyday! Mynheer Sour-krout, have you been broke upon fortune's wheel? Sure nothing less than absolute ruin can have curdled you so confoundedly.

Lov. You know not the pain of suffering, when it is those we love who wound us.

Sir Chas. Ah! I see how it is: my weathercock sister. She is as tantalizing as a trout, and as whimsical as—faith! I can't find a comparison. She will make a determination, and forget it while her lips are warm with the last syllable. Then, she plays on one as she would on her piano, will lead you thro' the whole scale of passion and humor

and, when she has run you up *con furioso*, *diminuendo* you down with such masterly skill, that I defy you to go off in any other strain than *pianissimo amorosamente*.

Lov. Her picture to the life. And now, Sir Charles, frankly tell me what you would have me do with this tyrant?

Sir Chas. Laugh at, and forget her.

Lov. Impossible.

Sir Chas. Why, then, be a slave still; or, if you prefer it, follow the glorious example of those redoubted heroes, who have gallantly thrown themselves into a horsepond, or boldly advanced into the noose of a garter! 'Tis not at all improbable, but your mistress may relent—when you are dead,—make your elegy to her waiting-woman, while dressing for a rout, and sacrifice a fan to your memory, while driving to it.

Lov. I think she once loved me, and that idea will ever keep me constant—your volatile heart is insensible to the refinements of love. You fly sportively from rose to rose, while I, who settle on a single flower, without the power, or the wish to change, view with poignancy the season of its fading, and dwell with melancholy pleasure even amidst the remaining thorns.

Sir Chas. Ha! ha! poor insect! Well, well, do as you please; hang, drown or marry; but remember, I tell you, that sneaking sort of manner will never do. No, Sir, depend upon it, a good bluff assurance takes with the women. Do you see how many wooden-headed fellows pass for men of *mettle*, by having brass facings to their blocks? I know a little of the world, Ned—woman is a subject I have handled pretty frequently, and, without vanity, may pretend to some knowledge of.

Lov. You may pretend to what you please,

except love. 'Tis not the ranting transports of passion that prove a lover, but those minute movements of the soul; those soft, indescribable feelings, the offspring of sympathy, which time matures into love, that beam forth in the most trifling actions, and on the slightest occasions. But this is all Hebrew to you, Sir Charles; love is like genius, it cannot be taught.

Sir Chas. If you must have similies, 'tis rather like short-hand, almost every one has a different system, and nothing but practice can teach it. It is a—but who comes here?

Lov. What, that popinjay yonder? That, Sir, is one of our chief verbal wits, commonly call'd punsters.

Sir Chas. That is, one of those, who knowing *words* are the *types* of *ideas*, think 'tis sufficient proof of their possessing the latter, by shewing they have a plentiful stock of the former.

Lov. 'Prythee, let us slip away before he sees us.

Sir Chas. Not I, 'faith! I think a fool the best company in the world.

Lov. Hang all fools! say I.

Sir Chas. Hang all fools! What a diabolical sentiment! Would you depopulate the country? Hist! hist!—he sees us—now shall we have a *bob-major* on the dictionary—hem!

Enter CLINCH.

Clinch. Ha! ha! Egad, I shall split. Lovel, your servant, ha! ha! Excuse me, but—ha! ha! I'm dying of laughing.

Sir Chas. (*aside.*) He has seen his shadow in a window.

Lov. Run to the theatre, they are rehearsing a

German comedy, and 'tis the best specific I know for the disorder you are dying of.

Clinch. You are as bad as my barber—always *cutting*. It puts me in mind of—Sir, I ask ten thousand pardons — I should apologize for my breach of manners.

Sir Chas. Oh! Sir, not the least occasion. A gentleman in your awful situation cannot be expected to be ceremonious.

Clinch. Eh! my awful! Oh! ay! ay! I take you. Ha! ha! a wag! a wag! ha! ha! faith, Sir, your wit forces me into another breach—Egad, though no tailor, I have made *a pair of breaches.*

Sir Chas. Ha! ha! excellent! (*aside to Lovel*) What damn'd fool is this?

Clinch. (*aside.*) A smart, clever young fellow. (*to Lovel*) Pray, who is this friend of your's?

Lov. Excuse my remissness. Sir Charles, allow me to introduce Mr. Clinch, a gentleman of great celebrity in the republic of letters—Sir Charles Wilding.

Clinch. Oh! what the *leveret*—as a cockney would say?

Sir Chas. Sir!

Clinch. The young *heir*, I mean. Ha! ha! excuse me, but it puts me in mind of what I said the other day to a certain Bishop: he and I had an argument as tough as bull-beef, so, to end all, says I, "my Lord, I really don't understand you at present, but I shall shortly have that pleasure, for I hear you are going to be *translated.*"

Sir Chas. Ha! ha! capital indeed! (*to Lov.*) Why don't you laugh, Ned?

Clinch. Sir, I see you relish wit. By the bye, that puts me in mind—my Lord Thingumbob asked me just now where the poet-laureat lived—"Upon

my word, my Lord," says I—" I can't tell—you had better ask at the *King's Mews*."

Sir Chas. Ha! ha! spare me, my good Sir, spare me.

Clinch. An exceeding clever young fellow indeed! (*aside.*)

Lov. And was that the formidable joke, that—

Clinch. Oh! no, Oh! no. Now you put me in mind, I'll tell you. Sir Gregory Groom, while turning a corner, just now, in his dogcart, bounced against his lady's landaulet, and was popp'd over as pat as a pancake;—Egad, and the simile's no bad one, let me tell you, for he was thrown souse into a gutter, and so had plenty of *dripping*.

Lov. If you are amused with such a simple accident, you would have burst your sides at the last fire.

Clinch. Upon my soul, Lovel, you are like a kitchen chimney, always *smoaking*. But the joke was, to see Sir Gregory and his lady—I overheard a footman say, 'twas the first time they had met for the last fortnight—they were terribly alarm'd, for they were nearly thrown into each other's arms.

Sir Chas. (*aside.*) This can't be my incognita! Pray, Sir, what sort of a woman is my Lady Groom?

Clinch. Really, Sir, I can't say. I hav'n't seen her face these five years.

Sir Chas. I thought you had seen her just now.

Clinch. Ha! ha! so I did; but, as I used to say of my great grandfather's wig, " thereby hangs a tale."—When a house is stuccoed, you know, one can't tell what its built of. But Lovel, here, knows all about her.

Lov. Not I, indeed. There's a tradition that she was once a fine woman, but as I am not a member of the Antiquarian Society, I never took the trouble to enquire into it. All I know is, that

she came very honestly by her charms, for, being rather eccentric in her manners, she pays her tradespeople.

Clinch. Did you ever hear such a fellow? He is only fit to be trustee to a turnpike, he is so fond of mending *high-ways.* But, zounds! I forget an engagement. Well, gentlemen, what say you to a *partie quarrée* to dine? Will you come, and be sarcastic with my mutton—*cut it up,* eh? I can't promise you rarities—*game* we can't want, for we can always make it. No words—I shall expect you. In the mean time, excuse me. I must smuggle myself away, as the phrase is—run. [*Exit.*

Sir Chas. Ha! ha! where the deuce did you pick up that fool?

Lov. Fool! I assure you he is considered one of the chief wits of the age.

Enter FLUTTER, *hastily.*

Ha! Melissa's woman!

Flut. Oh! gentlemen! gentlemen! dear, sweet gentlemen!

Sir Chas. Why, Flutter, your sensibility seems to have received a terrible shock.

Flut. Oh! Sir Charles—

Lov. Pray heaven Melissa is—

Flut. Oh! Mr. Lovel—

Lov. Flutter! Flutter! for heaven's sake, let me know the worst at once.

Flut. Oh! Sir, so unfortunate an accident!

Sir Chas. What, have you had your pocket picked of a keep-sake?

Lov. This is insufferable!

Flut. There, there, they are bringing him along now. Dear, dear Mr. Fangle, your honor's

footman, has just been arrested at the suit of a tailor.

Sir Chas. Come, Ned, summon your philosophy, and bear it like a man.

Lov. Psha!

Flut. Will nobody save him? must the dear, sweet man be paw'd by a dirty catchpole? Oh! good Sir Charles, have a little compassion and kill that vile catchpole.

Sir Chas. Excuse me, my dear, I must be barbarous enough to let him live. However, to oblige you, I will go and see what can be done for dear, sweet Mr. Fangle; though, let me tell you, I think it devilish impertinent to run in debt to an arrestable amount, 'tis affecting a style of life he has no title to: and if the lower orders give themselves such airs, as not to pay their debts, egad, there will be no such thing as distinguishing rank in society.

Flut. Ah! dear Sir Charles, pray go.

Sir Chas. I fly, Madam; and, in the mean time, if you should be inclined to fall into hysterics, I know my friend Lovel here will be happy to lend you his arms. [*Exit.*

Lov. I should take it as a particular favor, Mrs. Flutter, if you would come to a resolution as soon as possible.

Flut. Oh! Sir, I beg I may be no hindrance, Sir. One sees more of the world every day. Some folks are mighty thankful when other folks can serve 'em. Pray, Sir, don't let me keep you. I had a little matter to say, about—but I beg, Sir, I mayn't detain you.

Lov. [*Takes out his purse, and holds out his hand with money it, in an ironical manner*].—Good bye, Flutter.

Flut. Sir, I bear no malice, I assure you. You'll

excuse me, Sir, but, pray, is this a good one? for the last was a Frenchman.

Lov. Then, there's a real Englishman, and, as that is a match for two Frenchmen, it will just balance the account. I think, Flutter, you were saying you had something for me.

Flut. Was I, Sir? I'm sure I don't know what it could be then.

Lov. What the devil!

Flut. Oh! Lard! Sir, don't swear so. To be sure I have something to tell.

Lov. My dear Flutter!

Flut. Ah! now its my dear Flutter! I'm sure if you knew what a well-wisher I am—

Lov. I know it, I know it.

Flut. What risks I have run—

Lov. Zounds! I know them—all by heart. But I beg your pardon, I'm interrupting you—you were talking of—

Flut. Ah! you'll know some day or other what I've done for you. Well, but don't keep me any longer, for I'm now on my way to learn from your servant, what dress you go in to-night to the masquerade.

Lov. You don't say so?

Flut. Perhaps not, so don't believe me. Lard bless us! there's our old gentleman, and if he should see me with you—

Lov. Follow me, my dear creature—You have restored me to life.

Flut. Ah! how little you men know us women!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*An Apartment in Beaumont's House.*

Enter SERGE *and a* SERVANT.

Serg. I tell you, Sir, I want to see your master or mistress.

Serv. They never sees tradesmen at this time of day. Besides, we're all in a bustle with our masquerade to-night. Call again to-morrow.

Serge. Masquerade to-night! The fellow's drunk. Why, you impertinent, overfed puppy—

Serv. Come, come, none of your jaw here—leave your bill, and walk off.

Serge. Leave my bill, and walk off! a discreet, well-bred porter. You impudent jackanapes, do you know who you speak to?

Serv. Sir, I ask pardon—you're a character perhaps?

Serge. A character, Sirrah! a character! What do you mean, eh? I'll teach you to laugh at your betters, Sirrah.

Serv. Oh! Lord, Sir, pray don't carry the joke so far.

Serge. Joke! you damn'd impudent son of a—I'll joke you, you scoundrel!

Enter BEAUMONT.

Beau. Bless me! Mr. Serge! how is this?

Serv. [*Aside.*] I'm in the wrong box here, I see. [*Exit.*

Serge. An impudent rascal! Sir, your servant. Your man here has just been giving me a little specimen of your domestic economy. Ay! ay! it is not to be wondered at, whatever happens. I prophecied this three years ago—I said how it would be.

Beau. [*Aside.*] Damn'd unlucky!—You received Mrs. Beaumont's note, Sir, I suppose?

Serge. You suppose right, Sir; for, after what has happen'd, nothing but your own request should have brought me here.

Beau. I am extremely sorry, Sir, you should have had the trouble.

Serge. Pooh! pooh! don't tell me any such thing—You're not sorry, you know you're not. But where's my niece?

Beau. Sir, I'll send to inform her you are here. She had intended the pleasure of waiting on you to-morrow morning—Here, who waits?

Enter SERVANT.

Tell your mistress Mr. Serge is below.

[*Exit* SERVANT.

But, I beg a thousand pardons—pray, be seated.

Serge. Why, I believe I will. I'm somewhat tired.—Pray, what may be the price of these chairs?

Beau. The price, Sir! Really, I can't exactly call to memory.

Serge. Ah! I see how it is. Pray, was that your house and furniture I saw advertised this morning? The house and furniture of a gentleman going abroad.

Beau. No, indeed, Sir; I presume you are ignorant—Oh! here is Mrs. Beaumont.

Enter Mrs. BEAUMONT.

My dear, here is your worthy uncle, Mr. Serge. The natural goodness of his heart has induced him to overlook—

Serge. Sir, I thank you; but affairs of this kind don't require masters of the ceremonies. Oh! Lucy! Lucy! its a sad thing that nothing but misfortune can bring us together.

Mrs. B. I'm sure, Sir, I have always had a very great respect for you.

Beau. Indeed, my dear, I must do you the justice to say, that, tho' an unfortunate misunderstanding has subsisted between you, you have always spoken of Mr. Serge in the warmest terms.

Serge. Well, well; you see I am right at last. I gave you fair warning.—Had you taken my advice when you married, you would have been in a different situation now. Yes, Sir, if you had vested your wife's fortune in broad-cloths, you might have made a pretty penny of it.

Beau. [*Aside.*] I shall laugh in the old fool's face.

Serge. But that was beneath so fine a gentleman —the idea was a *damn'd low one*; you must launch out, and figure away as a first rate—nothing but routs and riots. That money that was hardly earned in Cheapside, must be lavished in St. James's—in short, you set up a private mad-house, without taking out a licence.

Beau. [*Aside.*] Hang him! I must bear it.

Serge. But there's no use going back; the future is our present consideration. I trust you are both wiser from the experience of folly.

Beau. I am sure I speak Mrs. Beaumont's sentiments, when I declare that nothing has so sensibly affected us, as the consideration that our present difficulties are owing to the rejection of your advice. —[*Aside to Mrs. B.*] Why the devil can't you say something!—You remember, my dear, it was but the other day we were talking on the subject.

Serge. Well, Sir; and, pray, what may your plan be now?

Beau. I bow, Sir, to your superior judgment.

Serge. Why then, Sir, I think your wisest plan would be, to get out of the way as soon as possible.

Beau. Out of the way, Sir?

Serge. Yes; till matters are blown over a little.

Mrs. B. I am quite of your opinion, Sir. If we were to go to Bath now, for a month or so; or——

Serge. Bath! out of the frying-pan into the fire

—eh? no, no. I have a wiser plan than that—It happens fortunately I have a vessel on the point of sailing for the Brazils. I think, Sir, you are shrewd enough if you please. I will make it worth your while to take a trip, as supercargo. In the mean time I will settle all your affairs, and your wife, here, shall go home with me to Fenchurch Street.

Beau. I, a supercargo to the Brazils!

Mrs. B. I go to Fenchurch Street!

Serge. Eh! what now!

Beau. I am afraid, Sir, there is some little mistake between us.

Mrs B. I must say Mr. Serge has taken it up in a very odd light.

Serge. An odd light, eh?

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. Madam, here is the Milliner with your masquerade dress.

Beau. How dare you intrude thus?—Leave the room. [*Exit* SERVANT.

Serge. Masquerade dress! So the fellow was not drunk. Yes, yes, I see I have taken it up in an odd light.

Beau. Sir, this is only a little entertainment, by way of paying off our debts of the complimentary kind. I perceive you do not clearly understand our situation. My affairs, it is true, are, at present, rather deranged, but a small accommodation would easily enable me to retrieve them. For this purpose we applied to you, knowing that your goodness—

Serge. Oh! I understand you. You have been travelling post to the devil, but are now obliged to stop on the road for want of means, so apply to me to help you on the rest of your journey.

Beau. Sir!

Mrs. B. What vulgarity!

Serge. No, Sir, I will not set up, in my old age, as an encourager of extravagance and debauchery. I had some hopes of reclaiming you, but I see they are vain. Look ye, Sir, I have proposed a plan for saving you; if you think fit to adopt it, you shall have my hearty concurrence; but not a shilling of mine shall go to support you in the scandalous course of life you are now pursuing.—Now I've told you my mind on the matter.

Beau. Sir, I have a spirit that disdains to truckle to insolent wealth, nor will I calmly suffer the contempt of any man.

Serge. Then, Sir, you must learn not to deserve it.

Beau. Your age and situation, Sir, plead your pardon with me; but, as I know not how much longer I can keep my temper, I must request you to walk out of my house.

Serge. With all my heart, Sir. As to you, Madam, I pity you from my soul. I am sorry you have scorned my assistance; but remember this, that whenever the day comes that shall cause you to *feel* the want of a friend, you will know where to seek a real one.—And so—your servant. [*Exit.*

Beau. Impertinent fellow!

Mrs. B. I never heard any thing so ridiculous in all my life.

Beau. I think, Madam, it would have become you, to have attempted to soothe him. You saw very well I was obliged to take it up warmly, and you know how little we can afford to lose even such friends as these.

Mrs. B. Sir, your servant—I am always wrong—I never do any thing right in your opinion.

Beau. I am not held to be a singular man either.

Mrs. B. Well, Sir, I have not time just now for

a quarrel, so we'll postpone it, if you please, to another opportunity. [*Exit.*

Beau. Yes, yes, Madam, I can divine the cause of your impatience; but I shall be equal to you there. Hark! the company are coming already. I must run and slip on my habit. [*Exit.*

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I. — *Another Room in Beaumont's House.*

Enter several Masks, in Spanish Habits, who sing the following, and pass off.

GLEE.

Still is the night, scarce a zephyr is moving,
Nought but the sigh of the lover is heard:
Each tune his lute to the passion he's proving,
And rival the notes of the night-loving bird.

Lull not the proud with a sorrowful ditty,
Rouse her from rest who has broken your own:
But she, whose soft bosom is open to pity,
Soothe, soothe her to sleep with a sweet flowing tone.

So soft be the strain, that it steal to her heart,
While prudence, and each chilling thought is at rest,
There, sweetly in visions love's tidings impart,
Nor wake but the pity that lurks in each breast.

Then each to the lattice of her he loves dearly,
The stars wink to see us so merrily given,
While scar'd by the transports of lovers so cheerly,
Chaste Dian' scarce ventures to peep out of heav'n.

Apollo! oh! deign each fond breast to inspire!
Blythe Bacchus, thy brother, hath lent us his aid;
Then grant us thy skill, and the glow of thy fire
To soften the heart of each beautiful maid.

Enter SIR CHARLES *and* CLINCH *(in dominos) and* LOVEL *(in propria personâ.)*

Clinch. Ha! ha! egad, Lovel, you put me in mind of the chimney-sweeper, who, when he wanted to disguise himself, washed his face. I suppose you come in the character of naked truth?

Sir Chas. He has lost his character, and is come here to look for it.

Lov. Faith, gentlemen, I come in my own character, and for the same reason that a cockney artisan wears a great coat in the dog days, to shew that I have one. I am something of a virtuoso, and am fond of rarities.

Clinch. Ha! ha! you'll always be an *odd* man till you're married. You're the first person singular here—I'll be sworn.

Sir Chas. Mere affectation, take my word for it — the common-place sentiments of a would-be sage. His wisdom swims on the surface, like a floating light over a shoal. He's no saint at bottom.

Clinch. If he was, he must be a devilish *deep* fellow, for I could never come within the soundings of his sanctity.

Sir Chas. There's a devilish fine figure yonder—Excuse me. [*Exit.*

Lov. And me. [*Exit.*

Clinch. All vanished! choice spirits, upon my word! It puts me in mind of—but I may as well keep that for another opportunity. Who have we here? Hist! Hist! I may pick up an anecdote.

[*Retires.*

Enter MELISSA, *and* CANKER *(as a Franciscan).*

Can. Most divine goddess!

Mel. [*In a feigned voice*]. Hush! hush! suppose we are overheard? Speak lower, or disguise your voice, as I do.

Can. Madam, I admire your discretion. One can't be too careful in this censorious age. Such is the wickedness of the times, people don't mind what they say, not they.

Mel. True, Sir; for do you know, they even speak against you?

Can. Aye! aye! scandal! scandal! the way of the age. The fops and fools of the town, like their kinsmen the monkies, always raise an outcry when a man comes among them.

Mel. Envy! mere envy! and yet they talk very confidently too. I'm afraid you're a sly creature.

Can. [*Aside*]. She has heard of Miss Fitzthimble! Ay! ay! this is the peering spirit of the age—one can't trust any one now-a-days—deceit in all corners—I suppose you mean my affair at—eh? eh?

Mel. The same.

Can. [*Aside*]. She must be interested about me! And, pray, how did you discover it was me, when I go by the name of Higgins there? To be sure you could guess that. Bless us! to see how things will out! Oh! you slyboots!—Mum! mum! and, pray, didn't you observe my adoration before this? You never noticed my treading on your toe the other day, nor my squeezing your little finger.

Mel. Thanks to this shield of my blushes, I may now confess I did. But, alas! my husband is a very Argus—I protest, I am almost afraid he may be observing us now.

Can. Good lack! that's true, so he may. One can't be too cautious now-a-days. But can't you contrive just to slip out?

Mel. Not for the world; he has spies in all corners. Hush! what was that?

Can. Eh! bless us! hem! hem! I think I had better not stay here.

Mel. Pray do not. But, stop — cou'dn't we contrive—yes, yes; I have an old nurse, who, my husband knows, is coming to see me from the country—now, if you could manage to assume a disguise of that kind—

Can. To tell you the truth, I have one by me, that I use now and then, to escape suspicion—there's nothing like prudence now-a-days.

Mel. It is indeed a virtue rather rare in these times. You must think me prodigiously bold, I fear—but having a prudent person to deal with makes me less scrupulous. So, let me see you to-morrow at twelve, and bring your prudence with you.

Can. But, won't you.

Mel. La! I vow you are unconscionable—well there—don't eat my hand up.

Can. Oh, you, dear, sweet, pretty darling!

[*Exeunt, on opposite sides.*

Enter CLINCH.

Clinch. Bravo! old boy; A *rare* fellow, and wants *roasting*. Eh! coming again — I'll bear up, and come down upon him.

Enter BEAUMONT *(as a Franciscan).*

Beau. Yonder she is—the red flag is out, and I must prepare for action.

Clinch. Sir, your most obedient, very humble servant.

Beau. Clinch, is it you?

Clinch. Hey! what "two Richards in the Field?" Why, sure I saw you just now?

Beau. Me?

Clinch. Ay! ay! changed your voice—*Vox et preterea nihil*—laying in provision for the convent, eh? well, well, well, there's no harm in it—all flesh is grass—only, don't go grazing in another's pasture.

Beau. [*Aside*] He has overheard them—hark'ee! this way—here are company. [*Exeunt.*

Enter LAURA *(as a Nun).*

Lau. Where can Melissa be? I have sought her every where. Would I had not yielded to this foolish scheme! heigho! how little this gaiety suits my feelings! [*Retires up.*

Enter SIR CHARLES, *and* MRS. BEAUMONT (*as a Diana).*

Sir Chas. Stop—stop, my dear goddess—if you are flying to heaven, pray, take me with you.

Lau. Oh, heavens! *(She leans for support against the scene)* What can I do?

Mrs. Beau. Remember, rash youth, the fate of Actæon.

Sir Chas. Fair planet, being moonstruck, what wonder is it that I act madly? Pardon me, that black cloud over your face—

Mrs. Beau. Sir, I beg—

Sir Chas. Pray, Madam, don't oppose a madman—"Off, off, ye lendings!"

[*Takes off her mask, his own falls.*]

Ha! my fair incognita, by all that's lovely!

Mrs. Beau. [*Aside*]. As I live, the gallant youth I met to day!

Sir Chas. Upon my word, Madam, fortune is a

very obliging lady, and makes a most excellent mistress of the ceremonies.

Mrs. B. She is, at least, Sir, a strict observer of justice, and is determined I shall duly pay the debt of gratitude I owe you.

Sir Chas. Oh! Madam, gallantry, like virtue, carries its own reward. It is—but I am neglecting it, by my praises.

Mrs. B. La! this is very ridiculous. Let go my hand—I protest I shall lose my character.

Sir Chas. I shall be extremely happy to help you off with it.

Mrs. B. Go, you wild thing—nay, I vow you must leave me. I can't suffer this, indeed.

Sir Chas. Ah! Madam, blame nature, not me, for my rudeness. She has made my heart of such soft materials, that Cupid has stuck it as full as a milliner's pincushion. I follow beauty instinctively, it is the moon that sways the tides of my heart, which ebb and flow with its frowns and smiles. Blame me not, therefore, but consider, that I only do homage to those charms which were made to be adored. [*Kneeling.*]

Lau. Oh, heavens! [*Faints.*]

Sir Chas. [*Starts up.*] Ha!

Mrs. B. I am observed. [*Exit.*

Sir Chas. The voice was familiar—a nun! she faints! [*He supports her.*] Is there no one here? Ha! Laura! Good heavens! Laura! Laura! she stirs—she revives—Laura! my dear Laura!

Lau. Is it you, Melissa?

Sir Chas. Look up my dear girl, 'tis I.

Lau. Sir Charles! I—I—thank you, Sir—I require no assistance—pray, don't mind me.

Sir Chas. Not mind you, my dear girl! Nay, nay, lean on me—you are agitated—you need support.

Lau. Leave me, pray leave me.

Sir Chas. Leave you!

Lau. In mercy leave me, leave me, leave me for ever.

Sir Chas. You alarm me, my dear girl. This is more than common illness—Dearest Laura, why this reserve? why this repulsive treatment? I confess, indeed, my levities merit reproof; but if a heart, swelling with the pure love of a brother—you start!—whence this agitation? I conjure you by the memory of our childhood, and those happy days of confidence and friendship we have past together—

Lau. This is too much! To what misery am I doomed! I am faint—very faint.

Sir Chas. Seat yourself here a moment, my sweet girl, while I fly for some refreshment. You will be better soon. I will return in a moment. [*Exit.*

Lau. What have I done! what can he imagine! How singular must I appear in his eyes! why do I cherish this hopeless passion, which every moment leads me into fresh misery! I had better not wait his return—he may think I am desirous of his attentions—yes, I have already lowered myself enough in his esteem.

Enter BEAUMONT.

Beau. So far I have been successful. Ha! Laura, is it not? And alone too, by all my hopes.

Lau. My uncle! then I am undone on all sides! Sir, it is needless to confess my indiscretion—you seem surprised I should know you. I can scarce support myself, and my spirits are too far gone now to satisfy you. Have but the goodness to get me conveyed home, and reserve your anger and your questions 'till I am better able to bear them.

Beau. [*Aside.*] Fortune! Fortune! I shall turn Pagan and worship thee. [*Exeunt.*

Re-enter SIR CHARLES.

Sir Chas. I have procured—ha! gone—Hey! who is that with her? a young fellow by his air! —familiar enough—Aye! aye! I see how it is. I thought there was something singularly reserved in her manner—Yes, yes, I have been acting the part of Marplot—yet 'tis impossible not to be interested about her. Her manner is so engaging, such modest sensibility, such delicate propriety! such—Heigho! what the devil's the matter with me? Aye, the way of the world—we never care for a thing till we have lost it—Ha! ha! ha! faith, I can't help laughing at myself—Yet why should I? I'm in love perhaps, what of that? As to any thing else, I hate formality—marriage is a mere *ceremony!* and I can easily dispense with it—Marriage, "thou dreadful, pleasing thought!" Ha! ha! I'll go moralize at White's till morning, and then go to bed as all sober rakes should. [*Exit.*

Enter MELISSA.

Mel. My *pastor fido* has at last discovered me. I think I may as well teaze him a little longer, as I perceive he is so tractable. 'Tis the best thing in the world for a lover's constitution—these gusts keep alive the embers of passion, and are excellent preparatives for the marriage state.

Enter LOVEL.

Lov. 'Tis certainly her. How silly of me—I tremble as if—psha! courage, man!

Mel. [*Sings.*] "Nobody coming to marry me, nobody coming to woo."

Lov. Yes, 'tis her, and in one of her madcap humours. Hem! surely the poets are right in ascribing an instinctive sympathy to love;—by the fluttering of my heart, and the agitation of my spirits you should be Melissa.

Mel. By those symptoms, it is more probable I am a ghost.

Lov. 'Tis for you to dread such things, who have killed so many—

Mel. Bless me! quite a new idea! Well, I do pity you men, to think how you must rack your heads for novelty to entertain us with.

Lov. I wish your pity were rather shewn by not racking your heads in contriving how to rack our hearts.

Mel. Lord! you talk to me, as if I was a familiar of the Inquisition—I hate such jargon. At one time you come to me, as if I was a confectioner—'tis nothing but—my *sweet this* and my *sweet that.* Then, one would think I were a blacksmith, and there's such a fuss about the *fire* of my eyes, and my *chains*, and putting *bars* to your happiness, and *rivetting* I don't know what—I vow I wont be treated in such a mechanic manner.

Lov. A truce to this levity. Believe me, dear Melissa. [*Endeavours to take her hand.*]

Mel. Holla! Sir! pray keep your distance.

Lov. The time is too precious for trifling. Your morose guardian has forbad my visits: then why neglect the moments fortune allows us?

Mel. Upon my word, Mr. Lovel, you talk in a very strange way. Really, when gentlemen have done with the bottle, the butler should lock them up in his pantry, or there should be a delegate from the chancery in all convivial societies, to take care, as the law directs, of all who can't take care of themselves.

Lov. Zounds! Madam!—

Mel. Watch! watch! Sir, if you grow outrageous, I must call in the constable.

Lov. Was there ever such a woman! Oh! Melissa! that you could look in upon my heart, and view its movements! to mark what swells of extacy your smiles occasion, what throbs of agony your frowns give rise to! could you but perceive how fixed, how mingled with my being, your dear idea is! Could you but observe in the busiest, or gayest of my hours, when your sweet image is for a moment obscured, with what a fervid glow it rushes back to my heart—I am confident—yes, I am confident you would spare me.

Mel. [*Aside.*] Deuce take him! I shall certainly make a fool of myself.

Lov. Believe me, the love I bear you, is not a momentary hectic, a flush of passion. It is engrafted on my soul, it is associated with every idea of felicity, and the substance of every hope. Heaven gave us woman to balance the evils of our being—Ah! why render the intended balm more agonizing than the ills it should alleviate?

Mel. [*Aside.*] I shall never be able to support it without a struggle.—Hem! I believe, Mr. Lovel, I must be a little candid.

Lov. My charming girl!

Mel. I have been a long time very seriously considering the matter, and have duly weighed and deliberated, whether it is more adviseable—to be an old maid, or not.

Lov. Provoking creature! Well and you have decided—

Mel. Decided indeed! as if it were a mere *pied poudre* cause—What, Sir! do you take me for a rash, unthinking thing?

Lov. Nay, now, Melissa—

Mel. Yes, yes, you think me a wild, giddy creature.

Lov. S'death! but, Melissa—

Mel. You will find I have a true British spirit, and will fight hard before I resign my liberty. Ha! ha! out of humour again! a pretty specimen you give me of what you would be! ah! you men are such versatile beings! The song says—but that we may have harmony between us, I'll sing it.

AIR (MELISSA).

Flora had wove each vernal grace
In union with the rose,
Where, tir'd with the lengthen'd chase,
I sunk to soft repose.
Young Love, it chanc'd, came forth that way
And slily, as I sleeping lay,
He stole my bow and shafts away.
But tho' my bow and shafts were flown,
The cunning God had left his own.

A distant bugle's echoing swell
Broke sudden on mine ear,
I started from the flow'ry dell,
And check'd the flying deer.
But when the traitor's darts I tried,
The deer, as if they would deride
Their wounds, came frisking to my side.
But though my bow and shafts were flown,
The cunning god's I thought my own.

But lo! a man!—with sudden fear
I pierc'd him to the heart—
T'was strange!—the mortal still drew near,
And smiling, kiss'd the dart.

I heard young Cupid laugh with glee—
I wonder'd whence the voice could be—
The little rogue was on a tree.—
" See where your bow and shafts are flown—
" Mine suit you better than your own."

[*Exit.*

Lov. Cruel girl! yet I am so manacled with her chains that I should only wound myself in struggling to be free. [*Exit.*

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I. — *Canker's House.*

Enter MELISSA *and* LAURA.

Mel. You see, my dear, the power of your charms. Depend upon it, you will figure as a heroine in history, and we shall shortly have the circulating libraries teeming with novels founded on a recent fact.—But you have not told me how you escaped.

Lau. I was scarce seated in the carriage, when the villain declared himself: I know not how it was; but, instead of sinking under the horror of the discovery, I rather gained additional strength. My screams (for I resorted to them, as my most effectual defence) soon collected a crowd; the carriage was stopt, I leapt out—; you may suppose my joy at finding myself in the arms of a friend, the gallant, the generous Lovel.

Mel. Heigho! its very odd, nobody will run away with *me*. I think though you would have preferred the arms of a certain other young man.

Lau. Why will you persist in that nonsensical idea? I am sure, if you knew what pain it causes me, you would refrain, even though you lost a jest by it.

Mel. You deserve to be punished for your hypocrisy; and since you libel my penetration, I fairly give you warning, I am determined to prove its correctness.

Lau. If you loved me, delicacy would temper your ridicule; but you seem to derive pleasure from my sufferings. Indeed, Melissa, I am far from being happy, and you deprive me of the soothing kindness of friendship, when I most require it.

Mel. You do me injustice, my dear Laura, to doubt my friendship, 'tis I who should exclaim, since you deny me its first privilege, confidence. But why this obstinate silence? Why this perverse equivocation? You vainly think you have locked up a secret in your breast, when the cunning prisoner has long since made his escape.

Lau. Indeed, I fear my weakness is too apparent.

Mel. For mercy's sake, do leave off this pitiful manner. To be sure, I can very easily comprehend your feelings, for I was once just in your way for near three—weeks. I was then at school, and fell in love—Heigho! with the dancing-master's apprentice. Oh! Lord! I remember I was so terribly dumpish; I had no more appetite than an alderman the day after a Lord Mayor's dinner; and used to sit for hours, looking at the moon thro' the skylight, and if I did drop asleep—lud! I was always dreaming that the dear fellow was playing on his kit, while I was dancing a minuet.

Lau. How I envy you that happy indifference!

Mel. Ah! if your way of thinking be wisdom, I am glad I have sense enough to be a fool. But come, come, I must absolutely bring you to confess; so, without more hemming and hawing, I charge you to declare, whether you are not desperately smitten with my volatile brother, Sir Charles?

Lau. I must throw myself on your mercy, for I feel I cannot deny it, and I would I could banish my folly with the breath that bears its confession. Ah! Melissa, if you had known what

struggles my silly heart has made to keep out the insinuating passion— !

Mel. Lack-a-day ! But, pray, why so ? Is Sir Charles such a terrible creature, or are you one of those prim one's, whose breast, like a market town, admits no vagrants ?

Lau. Sir Charles's heart is too much occupied ever to feel for me. Oh ! Melissa, last night I— Heavens, he is here.

Enter SIR CHARLES.

Mel. So, Sir, you are a pretty gallant, to forsake two forlorn damsels, as you did last night. But, to be sure, *nonchalance* is now the fashion, and the greatest rule of good-breeding is not to shew any.

Sir Chas. I believe there is another rule also, which enacts, that you should keep away where you are not wanted. Amongst the old Grecians three was a fortunate number, but they knew nothing of tête-à-têtes.

Mel. I protest, I don't know what you mean. Your sense is so modest, that it goes veiled.

Sir Chas. I hope Miss Laura is not the worse for the fright I was so unfortunate as to occasion last night ?

Lau. The fright, Sir !

Sir Chas. I, perhaps, misname it ; or, as *I* was concerned in it, it may be too trivial to be remembered.

[*Melissa slips away.*

Lau. I think, Sir, I have more reason to apologize than you.

Sir Chas. [*Aside*] A home-thrust ! Hang it ! Melissa gone !

Lau. [*Aside*] How cruel of Melissa to leave me! [*A pause*].

Sir Chas. Hem! I—hem!

Lau. Sir!

Sir Chas. I was going to observe—hem!—psha! what have I to do with sheepishness? You and I, methinks, should know each other better. As to myself—but that's nothing to the purpose. In short, my dear Laura, I cannot be regardless of your altered manner. You formerly treated me with confidence and friendship; but now you seem to view me with repugnance, and treat me with the coolest reserve.

Lau. Indeed, Sir Charles, you are strangely mistaken.

Sir Chas. Mistaken! nay, this is a matter of feeling, not of judgment. Are you so lavish of your regards, as to bestow on one favour'd object the whole interest of your heart? Believe me, my dear girl, I deeply feel the injustice, and even envy that happiness you so profusely grant.

Lau. Really, Sir, I am at a loss to understand you.

Sir Chas. Surely you will not understand me. But I perceive you hold me undeserving your esteem. Fortune, however, has disclosed your secret to me.

Lau. [*Agitated*] My secret, Sir!

Sir Chas. Its consequence is observable enough from your alarm.

Lau. [*Aside*] Heavens! what can he mean?

Sir Chas. Be not terrified at my indiscretion; for though you may look on me (and perhaps with too much justice) as a giddy hairbrain'd fellow, my heart will never play the traitor, especially where it has such a temptation to be faithful.

Enter Servant.

Serv. A note, Sir, from Mr. Lovel. He is

waiting in the street, and desired me to deliver this to you.

Sir Chas. [*Reads*] "An affair of moment, in which I am engaged, obliges me to ask your assistance. Let me know if I can see you"—I shall be with him instantly. [*Exit Servant.*

Pray, pardon me; I find my presence only distresses you, and I can assure you, it is not the least part of my unhappiness, that you will not permit me to prove, how desirous I am to render you service. [*Exit.*

Lau. Yes, Melissa has betrayed me. How vain, how weak must I appear to him! His very pity is a ridicule of my weakness. Alas! how delusive, how transitory is human happiness! my heart has long cherished a fond idea, which, now matured into strength, turns upon its fosterer, and repays it with ruin. [*Exit.*

SCENE II.—*The Street.*

Enter SIR CHARLES *and* LOVEL.

Sir Chas. How say you! did he really presume? are you certain she never favored him?

Lov. Can it be doubted? a girl of such consummate modesty—a married man too!

Sir Chas. No—by heavens! I libel purity to suppose it. She is truly delicacy itself. But, say no more—Beaumont is a villain, and I will instantly—

Lov. Softly! softly! where are you going? your heart has run a race with your head, and beat it hollow. The affair is a delicate one, and requires discretion.

Sir Chas. Psha! psha! teach the blind, optics; and the dumb, oratory.

Lov. But, Sir Charles—nay, you must listen—remember, female reputation is of so delicate a growth, that the least blight stints it for ever. If this gets abroad, how can you stifle scandal, which will be whispering the public secret in every circle? Consider how it will gather as it rolls—how many insinuations, suspicions, hints, and conclusions will attach to it, and above all—how the overwhelming torrent will affect the sensitive modesty of her, whose cause you would thus rashly advocate?

Sir Chas. What, and would you have me tamely bear the insult?

Lov. Nay, the cause is no orphan. It seems Beaumont was piqued at my interference and plain language last night, and affects (with the common soreness of scoundrels) to feel himself injured. He demands satisfaction, and I cannot deny him what he so seldom meets with. I am no friend, it is true, to this mode of argument, but cases of this nature admit no alternative, and the cruelty of your sister makes me indifferent to its event.

Sir Char. True lovers are so rare now, that I cannot suffer you to throw yourself away. The cause properly belongs to me, and I will defend it.

Lov. Impossible! my honor is staked, and cannot admit a transfer.

Sir Chas. Sir, no one shall rob me of the merit of asserting the purity of an angel. I have injured her by suspicion, and if I fall, I only expiate my error.

Lov. But, Sir Charles.

Sir Chas. Not a word—I am resolved. [*Exit.*

Lov. The winds will listen to me sooner. [*Exit.*

SCENE III.—*Beaumont's House.*

Enter BEAUMONT.

Beau. Distraction! ruin on all sides! debts spring up like spectres! my designs are foiled, and rumour already begins to circulate. Curse on my furious impatience, what the devil have I to do with fighting? But 'tis now too late to recall, and after all, a pistol may be the best cure for my difficulties.

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. Mr. Flaw, the attorney, Sir.

Beau. Shew him in—he comes apropos.

Enter FLAW.

Well, Flaw?

Flaw. Sir, it is no such thing. I'm harrass'd to death with your affairs. One would need an office as large as Westminster Hall to manage your matters in. Nothing but duns and bills come thronging in, like bail on a justification day.

Beau. Pish! don't distract me with them now —bills, bills, bills,—you are ever chiming them in my ears.

Flaw. Sir, I shan't trouble myself with them. I have a character to maintain in the profession, and can't dabble any longer in dirty work—so, I have just brought a little account here.—

Beau. Sir, I can't attend to those things now.

Flaw. But, Sir, these things must be attended to now. Do you think to treat me like a Chancery bill, put me off from term to term

Beau. What, Sir!—but, come, come, Flaw,

what strange manner is this you have assumed? I thought you and I had known each other better.

Flaw. Sir, *I do know you*, and that accounts for my manner. You forget I lived next door to your father, old Bob Beaumont, the pawnbroker in Oxford Street.

Beau. For heaven's sake, Flaw!

Flaw. Know you, indeed! what, do you think I don't remember.—

Beau. Curse your memory! will you listen a moment?

Flaw. A pretty affair, truly!

Beau. Hark'ee, Sir, there is no use in deceiving you. You are well acquainted with my chequered history, and have seen me whirl round and round the wheel of fortune. The truth is, I have been too daring in my speculations. My situation is now become desperate;—difficulties clog my exertions, and to crown all, I am involved with a wife, and a duel.

Flaw. Um! as to the first, as Serjeant Snapfee observed in the case of Trapwell *versus* Simpleton, last Michaelmas term—"wives are now considered as to a species of goods."—As to the other matter, that's very easily remedied, dispatch an anonymous two-penny post letter to Bow Street.

Beau. To say the truth, my courage lessens with my desperation.—Honor is a mere phantom; if the world sees the shadow, it is quite enough.

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. A letter, Sir, for my lady.

Beau. Here, you may give it me.

[*Exit Servant.*

Ha! a man's hand—faith, the very same as the note I picked up yesterday. Listen, listen, you surly

rogue you, for I have a scheme will make both our fortunes. *(Opens the letter and reads.)*

" Most angelic madam"—so, so,—" a circum-
" stance has occurred, which will make it impru-
" dent for me to keep my appointment, and as one
" can't be too cautious now-a-days, I think it bet-
" ter to postpone my happiness, than risk the repu-
" tation of your fair self, or your doating admirer
" —a Franciscan Friar."—Better and better! what think you of this?

Flaw. I wish you joy. I always said we should have her some day in the King's Bench, and the Commons.

Beau. Chance, yesterday, threw into my hands what I have been long watching for. I have a credible witness of her guilt, who overheard an assignation last night, which this letter postpones.

Flaw. And, pray, who may the defendant be?

Beau. The devil take me if I can tell—they are cautious.

Flaw. Gadzooks! now you put me in mind, I remember I saw a young rake of fashion, one Sir Charles Wilding, gallanting in the street with her yesterday.

Beau. Sir Charles Wilding! it flashes on me—do you know his hand?

Flaw. Yes, I have done business for him in the supply way—um! not exactly; but then, to be sure, he would disguise it.

Beau. What if I were to sound my spare rib? if she knew I had the means of convicting her,—but hist! here she comes—give me the note, and step for a moment into this room. I'll see what I can make of her. [*Puts Flaw into a back room.*

Enter MRS. BEAUMONT.

Mrs. Beau. Ha! ha! well of all diverting spectacles, a vulgar fashionist is the most so.

Beau. You seem entertained, madam.

Mrs. Beau. I am indeed, Sir. I have just dismissed my levee, and sure, such a brood of characters never met. Here has been Mrs. Mushroom; —but you never saw her, so I'll give you her picture.

Beau. You are very obliging, Madam.

Mrs. B. Not at all, I assure you. I only want to rehearse the description, before I go to Lady Fiddlefaddle's.

Beau. Oh! Madam, you need not convince me of your proficiency in scandal.

Mrs. B. Scandal indeed!-only an essay, Sir, on what Pope says, is our most proper study, human character.

Beau. It must be confessed then, your female philosophers are actuated by a truly laudable spirit of enquiry; and it is, no doubt, from a modest consciousness of the difficulty of the science, that you confine your remarks to the varieties of character, which lie more particularly under your own observation.

Mrs. B. True, Sir; for which reason, I never talk of you. Tho', indeed, you bid fair to be a very popular subject. Your last night's adventure may rank with any in the annals of chivalry.

Beau. You seem highly pleased, Madam, with the knowledge of it. It must, indeed, be extremely gratifying to you, to discover any little errors in my conduct, since you no doubt conceive they may be serviceable in keeping yours in countenance.

Mrs. B. My errors, Sir!

Beau. Fashion, it is true, Madam, sanctions a freedom of manners beyond the bounds of strict propriety; but you should, at least, remember, that there is a necessary decorum to be preserved by your sex, a regard to public opinion in the breach of

private duties, which is essential to the honor and reputation of a husband.

Mrs. B. I protest, Sir, at first I thought you were serious; but now I hear you talk of *honor*, I am convinced you are jesting.

Beau. You really, Madam, carry it off with an excellent air.—A knowledge of the town, I perceive, has been of service to you.

Mrs. B. Your sense, Sir, is too deep for me to perceive—so, you'll excuse my wishing you good morning.—(*Going*).

Beau. Stay, Madam, stay, I cannot part with you so easily.—

Mrs. B. What is it you mean, Sir, by this rudeness?

Beau. Yes, Madam, you may well be alarmed. —I see you are not yet so hardened as to be deprived of consciousness.—You know this hand, I presume?—

Mrs. B. Ha! ha! ha! most sage of thy sex! You have brought the mouse out of the mountain.

Beau. 'Sdeath! Madam—this is no jest.—Do you think to jeer me into disbelief?—

Mrs. B. Not I, indeed, Sir, for nothing pleases me so much as your jealousy.—I assure you, I consider it as a very flattering omen.

Beau. Why do I suffer myself to be moved?— Your mirth, Madam, I assure you, is far from being effectual;—I have solid and satisfactory proofs of your guilt, as you and your paramour, Sir Charles Wilding, will shortly discover?

Mrs. B. Sir Charles Wilding! Is the man raving?

Beau. Come, come, Mrs. Beaumont, you must not carry this piece of acting so far.—You surely cannot imagine you deceive me? You know I am not to be trifled with—let us understand each other.

Mrs. B. Very willingly, Sir, if you will permit me; and to do my part towards it, I can assure you I never set eyes on Sir Charles Wilding in my life.

Beau. Oh, excellent woman!

Enter SERVANT.

Servt. Sir Charles Wilding, Sir.

Beau. Ah! is it so? You hear, Madam, Sir Charles Wilding! Shew him up, Sir. [*Exit Servt.* —Let us see this spark.

Mrs. B. You will now be convinced, Sir.

Enter SIR CHARLES.

Ha!

Sir Chas. My fair unknown! [*Aside.*

Beau. Their emotion is very visible.—If I could leave them together, Flaw might pick up some intelligence.

Sir Chas. Sir, my name may probably be familiar to you, though personally unacquainted.

Beau. Your name, Sir, is not unknown to me.

Sir Chas. The occasion, Sir, of my visit is—but might I be favoured with two minutes private conversation.

[*A Servant enters hastily and whispers Beaumont.*

Beau. Distraction! Is it come to that?—I must request your pardon, Sir Charles, for a moment.—An affair of consequence calls me away. [*Exit*

Sir Chas. Singular enough! I conceive, Madam, I need not hesitate by what title to address you? It is evident the fates determine we should be friends, though, on my honor, I cannot positively decide whether this interview affords me most pleasure or regret.

Mrs. B. And for my part, Sir Charles, I can-

not positively decide whether I should rebuke you for your rudeness or thank you for your gallantry.

Sir Chas. I should propose an act of oblivion, but I fear I can't be a party to it.

Mrs. B. Well, Sir, I believe you deserve mercy, so I'll pass an act of grace.

[*Flaw peeps out.*

Sir Charles. (Takes her hand). And thus the pardon's sealed. [*Kisses her hand.*

Enter SERVANT *(without his coat).*

Servt. I ask pardon, Madam, hope no offence, only a little accident has just happened.

Mrs. B. An accident!

Servt. The bum-bailiffs, Ma'am, are in the house—they have taken our livery suits, and are playing old Nick below,—hope no offence, Ma'am, but I thought it best to let your ladyship know.

Mrs. B. Good heavens! what new calamity is this?

Sir Chas. Pray, Madam, allow me to conduct you to a friend's house, a lady of the first fashion and of irreproachable character, till this affair is over.—It is doubtless owing to some mistake; but if it is in my power to render any assistance, I beg no delicacy may be used.

Mrs. B. The shock has overcome me.—Your obliging offer, Sir Charles, I thankfully accept.—These things, indeed, will happen in the best regulated families.—I vow the wretches are coming.

[*Exeunt.*

FLAW *comes forward.—Enter* BEAUMONT.

Beau. Oh! Flaw! Flaw! ruin stares me in the face.

Flaw. Don't be sheepish—look at him again, you won't find him so frightful.

Beau. What do you mean?

Flaw. Your wife's gone.

Beau. The devil take her.

Flaw. Ay! but you'll get nothing out of him, for the lawyers will all be on his side—Don't you see it?—A young rake comes into your house under the cloak of friendship, smiling and plausible, and takes advantage of a calamity to rob you of all you value in the world, leaving you involved in double distress, and smarting under accumulated anguish. —What could you wish for more fortunate? As the court observed last sittings, "such circumstances greatly aggravate matters, and deserve swinging damages."

Beau. An elopement!

Flaw. To be sure it is.—I'll go and draw up a case immediately, and do you go and pen a flaming paragraph for the Morning Post.

Beau. First see what can be done below.

Flaw. Ay! ay!—but as Counsellor Bother'em observed in the case of Jeremy *versus* Wiggins, last Hilary—"If we gain this cause we quash the others!" [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.—*Canker's House.*

Enter LAURA *and* FLUTTER.

Laura. A duel, do you say?

Flutt. Yes, Mem, you may depend upon it, it is true, for Mr. Fangle told me so.

Laura. Good heavens! perhaps at this very moment—Who has seen him?—Where is he gone?

Flutt. Lard! Mem, no one knows.—Mr. Fangle says he came home last night in a prodigious taking,

as if something had flustrated him.—Mr. Fangle thinks it was some matter about you, Mem.

Laura. About me!

Flutt. Yes, Mem, for when he got into his chamber, he flung himself, as it might be, into a chair, and says he to Mr. Fangle—for he is very fond of Mr. Fangle, Mem, and treats him more like a brother than a servant—

Laura. Well—well—but—

Flutt. So, Mem, says he—"Fangle"—says he—"have you heard talk of any one's keeping company with Miss Laura?"—says he.

Laura. Did he say so?

Flutt. Yes, Mem, those were his very words.

Laura. Can it be possible that—but why do I trifle at such a moment?—For Heaven's sake, Flutter, fly to Mr. Lovel—he doubtless knows it,—beg of him to interfere, and save this rash young man from destruction.

Flutt. Lard! Mem, but—

Laura. Do not hesitate—his life may even now be endangered.

Flutt. Well, Mem, but—

Laura. Haste — haste — delay may be ruin. *(Pushes Flutter out)*—Though he can never be mine, his life is far dearer to me than my own.

Enter MELISSA.

Oh! Melissa—What has your brother's rashness led him into?

Meliss. Bless me! What's the matter?

Laura. He is engaged in a duel.

Meliss. A duel! good gracious! with whom! when! where?

Laura. Alas! I know not.

Enter FLUTTER *(hastily).*

Flutt. Oh! Mem.—I have such news—

Laura. What! what!

Flutt. I am so out of breath, I can scarce speak.

Meliss. Any news of my brother?

Laura. Is Sir Charles—

Flutt. Do, Mem, wait one moment.—I vow I was so shocked, I should have fainted, but for Mr. Fangle's smelling bottle.

Laura. Merciful heaven! speak—speak, while I have life to hear.

Flutt. As sure as I stand here, Sir Charles has run away with Mrs. Beaumont.

Laura. Then hope and I may part for ever. *(Bursts into tears.)*

Meliss. Impossible! For Heaven's sake, my dearest Laura, do not agitate yourself thus.—Sir Charles has indeed the family failing—a volatile thoughtlessness—but this I am sure I may confidently say, that his heart will always be found ready to supply the deficiencies of his head.

Laura. I am a weak, silly creature, Melissa, I am indeed.

Meliss. I never can believe this. Flutter has mistaken.

Flutt. Yes, Mem, I was mistaken as to the duel, I confess, for it was not Sir Charles, but Mr. Lovel, that was—

Meliss. Lovel in a duel!

Flutt. Yes, Mem, for Mr. Fangle says—

Meliss. Gracious powers! Fly, fly—this instant—no—no—no—yes—yes—no—no—come back—come back—run for my things—I'll go myself—he may be killed before you get there—run—run—

[*Exit* FLUTTER.

Laura. Yourself, Melissa? Flutter may have misunderstood—

Meliss. I don't know that. I should never forgive myself if any thing happened to him. I have treated him barbarously—I have indeed—I have driven him to despair—what is the woman about—I have—I know I have.

Laura. But, Melissa—

Meliss. Don't talk to me—I shall go distracted—here Flutter! Flutter! [*Exit.*

Laura. I cannot blame her feelings. I can only envy her the power she has to render happy such a man as Lovel. Ah! why has Heaven taught my heart to feel, and yet has closed up every source of joy! But it is myself I should arraign. Why did I permit delusive hope to enter my bosom? Why have I cherish'd the deceitful stranger that came but to undo me?

Enter Sir CHARLES *(from behind).*

Oh! Charles! Charles! what misery have you entailed on my poor heart!

Sir Ch. Say not so, loveliest.

Laura. Ah! good Heaven!

Sir Ch. Fly not, my charming girl. Am I such an object of dread? Why thus averse to hear me? Nay, Laura, I must, I will know the cause of this singular repugnance. I feel it too keenly to be indifferent. Not a word! Will you not even deign to speak to me?

Laura. I must beg to be released, Sir, I—

Sir Ch. I cannot so tamely resign the opportunity—What is my crime? What have I done that deserves the torment you inflict? Oh! Laura! how little do you know me! Inflict misery on you! sooner would I die than cause you one thousandth

part of the agony I now feel; indeed, Laura, you judge me too severely.

Laura. Alas! Sir, my judgment is of little moment, but if you are candid in the wish for my favour—first gain the approbation of your own heart and then you shall have mine. [*Exit.*

Sir Ch. I am amazed! What can she mean? Faith I am almost inclined to suspect it is nothing but a piece of prudery—Prudery in her!—No, no, it cannot be—Jealousy!—hum—that's probable. That acid spirit often sours the milk of human kindness. And, yet,—zounds! 'tis no use speculating on the cause, I feel the effects, and my heart is deeply interested in their removal. [*Exit.*

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*Beaumont's House.*

Enter BEAUMONT *and* FLAW *(from opposite sides).*

Beau. Well, Flaw, how go matters?

Flaw. Swimmingly. The news is half over the town. I have retained counsel. By the bye, Serjeant Ogle wants to examine Madam's waiting woman this evening, at his own chambers.

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. Mr. Serge, Sir.

Beau. Serge! What the devil brings him here? Flaw do you see him. I had better not be visible, at present. [*Exit.*

Flaw. Ay! ay! leave him to me.

Enter SERGE.

Serge. So, Sir—Oh! I ask pardon, you're not the person I want.

Flaw. If it is Mr. Beaumont, Sir, you wish to see, I am sorry to say he is unable to see any one. You have heard, I presume, of his late domestic calamity?

Serge. It was the report that brought me here.

Flaw. Alas, Sir; the poor gentleman is too much affected at present to see company. He has remained shut up in his chamber with the window-shutters closed, ever since the lamentable event. I begin to be rather alarmed about his intellects.

Serge. So, then, the story is true, is it?

Flaw. True, Sir! As it was observed in the case of Clutterbuck *versus* Jenkins, at the last sittings at Guildhall—"so clear a case never came before a jury."

Serge. Unhappy creature! she has indeed carried her indiscretion to the height. You seem, Sir, to know the particulars of this unfortunate matter; —pardon the curiosity of an afflicted old man, who cannot forget he is the relation of this misguided woman.—Where is she? where can I find her?—It may not yet be too late to save her from total ruin.

Flaw. It is not exactly known, Sir, what road they have taken, but I rather imagine they have gone North, and if so, by this time they can't be far from York.

Mrs. B. (without.) What! forbad my own house!

Flaw. Heyday!

Serge. It is—it is her!

Enter Mrs. BEAUMONT.

Mrs. B. It is too much to bear!—Where is the monster! where is the villain who thus traduces me?

Serge. Ah Lucy! Lucy! what is this I hear?

Mrs. B. Oh! Sir, are you here? Then, thank heaven, I have one friend.

Flaw. This is really a very extraordinary affair —quite without precedent I believe. Pray, madam, let me ask you, how could you think of coming in this manner to shock the feelings of a husband, (for he must bear that title till he goes into the spiritual court)—I say, how could you think of such a thing after what has happened?

Mrs. B. And pray, Sir, who are you?

Flaw. Me, madam! I don't see any legal objection to answering that question.—I am Philip Flaw, of Symond's Inn, attorney to the prosecution.—You will be so good, if you please, Sir, to take particular notice of what is said, for I shall subpœna you on the trial.—

Mrs. B. And is it you, Sir, who have conspired to ruin me?

Flaw. Conspired, madam!—Observe, Sir, I am charged with a conspiracy.

Serge. I don't understand it, not I.

Mrs. B. Oh! Sir, I am a wretched woman beset with villainy.

Flaw. So, so; take notice, Sir, if you please.

Mrs. B. Villain! dare you insult me thus. *(advancing.)*

Flaw. Zounds! have a care—keep off—remember there's such a thing as law.

Mrs. B. Law! wretch! I shall go distracted.—Villain! villain! *(runs at Flaw.)*

Flaw. Why, madam! Holloa! mister! mister!

Serge. Nay, nay, Lucy——

Mrs. B. Pray, Sir, reach me a chair, I am quite overcome.

Flaw. I never saw so violent a woman in my life. She ought to be indicted as a common scold.

Mrs. B. Oh, Sir—that I had but listened to your prophetic words!

Serge. And is it true——

Mrs. B. True, Sir! heaven forbid!—I am not such a wretched being either. No, Sir, 'tis a deep laid mercenary scheme—a villainous design to crush me, and profit by my ruin.

Flaw. Madam, with the greatest deference I humbly beg leave to submit to you, that you are not perhaps aware your language is libellous and cogni-

zable in a court of law. I am not one, madam, that ever engages in dirty work. My name is Flaw, and I defy any one to attach an imputation to it.—You will excuse me, (but I beg you'll keep your temper) I must say the papers that have been put into my hands, when laid before a jury, would, as was observed by the court in a similar case—(I think it was Noodle *versus* Doodle), give us a verdict, undeniable as truth itself.

Mrs. B. Papers, Sir!

Flaw. (shrinking back.) Yes, Madam—no, Madam—that is—but as it is the usual method for both parties to name their attornies, perhaps it might be as well to proceed in the regular way—[*aside*]—I wish I was well quit of her.—

Serge. I know not how to reconcile this seeming contradiction.—Pray, Sir, what is the nature of the papers you mention?

Flaw. Hum! I don't know whether I ought to answer that question, legally speaking.

Mrs. B. Sir, I insist—

Flaw. Oh! Madam, that quite alters the case, I am always willing to oblige a lady. But hadn't you better refer me to your attorney? I am afraid the mention of these particulars may agitate you too much.

Mrs. B. No, Sir, I will not rest till I have detected the falsehood of the calumny.—I insist on knowing what you have to produce against me.

Serge. Yes, Sir, she has a right to know the charges brought against her.

Flaw. [*Aside.*] I'm prettily off between 'em.—Why, Madam, the papers I mean—but I beg you'll recollect I'm only the attorney to the plaintiff—the papers, Madam, are letters from—you know who.

Mrs. B. I know who!—How, Sir, do you charge me with——

Flaw. Oh! no, no, no, Madam, by no means. What I mean is, I have letters from Sir —— but, perhaps, you recollect the Franciscan monk?

Mrs. B. And is that all your evidence, Sir?

Flaw. Not entirely, Madam, though I believe it will be granted it is pretty strong.

Serge. What is this?

Mrs. B. You'll shortly know, Sir. [*To Flaw.*] You have professed yourself an honest man, Sir, I ask you to accompany me to Mr. Canker's in the next street, and I pledge myself satisfactorily to explain this matter, and prove the falsehood of the calumny raised against me.

Flaw. Upon my word, Madam—bless me! it's past the hour I was to have met a gentleman on particular business.—

Serge. Look ye, Sir—I take it a lady's reputation is a business of more importance—

Flaw. Sir, my time is not my own—extremely sorry—but upon my word—I can't possibly—

Serge. Sir, I know the value of your time, and I'll take care you shan't lose by any thing that concerns me or my niece.

Flaw. Sir, you speak so much like a gentleman, I can't possibly refuse a request so genteely made.

Mrs. B. Come then, Sir, follow me. [*Exit.*

Flaw. After you, Sir, if you please.—I couldn't think of such a thing, upon my honor.—This is a rare business—fishing on both sides the water.—If I don't diddle them both—call me no lawyer.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*Canker's House.*

Enter LOVEL *and Sir* CHARLES *(meeting).*

Lovel. Bless me, Sir Charles, is it really you?

Sir Chas. Upon my word, Sir, that is a point I am not determined on.—I don't feel quite myself.—But how is this? I don't know which to wonder at most, your presence or your question.

Lovel. As to being here, my concern for your reputation brought me.—And I may well be surprised to see you when, by the most undoubted authority, you are at least half way to Scotland.

Sir Chas. What nonsense is this?

Lovel. That you can best explain.—I make it a rule never to credit more than half a report, and having just heard that you and Beaumont's wife had eloped, I conclude you have been playing the fool already.

Sir Chas. Is it possible you are in earnest?

Lovel. It may be a very good jest for aught I know.

Sir Chas. Curse this malicious town!

Lovel. Ay, Sir; 'tis a sort of hothouse, where people are brought to perfection before they are in season.—You seem to have throve surprisingly in it.

Sir Chas. The truth is, Ned, I am a fool.

Lovel. The confession of it proves your wisdom.—I really believe, Sir Charles, you wear the mask of hypocrisy the wrong side outwards.—And, yet—is it possible you have given occasion to a report of this nature?

Sir Chas. I can't tell whether to say, yes, or no. Fortune has been playing blindman's-buff with me.

Lovel. Pardon me, I know the temper and character of the man you are said to have injured. I greatly fear you have committed yourself, for the report is sanctioned by Beaumont himself.

Sir Chas. How!

Enter FLUTTER.

Flutt. Well, I vow—lard! Sir Charles! I protest you have put me into such a quandary!

Sir Chas. I seem to frighten every one, I think.

Flutt. Ah, well you may — to take to such wicked courses.

Sir Chas. Plague on it, have the chambermaids got hold of it already? I shall be balladed in a day or two, and chalked all over the town.

Flutt. And Mr. Lovel, too! I am glad to see you alive, Sir, with all my heart.

Lovel. And I, Madam, am extremely happy to hear you say so.—I perceive, Mrs. Flutter, that you entirely agree with the philosopher—that, "in the midst of life we are dying."

Sir Ch. Perhaps she thought such a high-flown *inamorato* as you, would have had the consistency to drown all thoughts of your mistress's cruelty in a horse-pond.

Flutt. Cruelty, indeed! poor dear lady—I'm sure I never saw any body take on so in all my life—but hav'n't you seen her?

Lovel. Seen her! why, what——?

Flutt. Lard! Sir.—She is gone in search of you—ay! you may stare—but as sure as I stand here—when she heard you were going to fight a duel, she went like one distracted.

Lovel. Is it possible?

Sir Ch. Possible, but not probable; the definition of a miracle.—And yet we have heard of women changing their minds now and then.—

Flutt. Ay, you may say what you will, but you'll find it true, for Mr. Fangle got a coach for her.—Lard! sure I hear her now.

Lovel. 'Tis her—let me fly to—

Sir Ch. Stop, stop ; you'll spoil all.—You lovers are so thick-headed.—Here—here—no flying just now—hop into this room and leave her to me a moment.—When I, hem ! then fly out—coo as much as you please, and see if you can't persuade her to go to roost with you !

Lovel. Well, but—

Sir Ch. Shoo — shoo — shoo.—There, in with you—*(Pushes him in).*—Flutter, not a word on your life. *(Walks up).*

Enter MELISSA.

Mel. No where to be found ?—Flutter, give me a chair, I am ready to sink.

Sir Ch. [*As if talking to himself.*] No—I don't see any reason for concealing it.

Mel. What, Charles !

Sir Ch. She has never shewn any regard for him, and will not be greatly shock'd to hear of the fatal event.

Mel. What does he say ?—Charles ! Charles !—What is it you mean ?—What fatal event has happened ?

Sir Ch. What, Melissa ?

Mel. For heaven's sake speak—what do you mean ?—You seem embarrassed—tell me the worst at once !

Sir Ch. Alas ! poor Lovel ! *(Turns away and hides his face in his handkerchief.)*—Egad ! I can scarce keep my countenance !

Mel. Hey !—Why is he not laughing ?—I suspect something here ! [*Aside.*]—Lovel ! why surely nothing has happened to him ?—

Sir Ch. Don't ask me.—And yet why should I conceal it ?—Can I expect you should feel more for him now, when he is incapable of being moved by your pity—

Mel. How! [*Aside.*]—He speaks earnestly.

Sir Ch. Oh! Melissa! if you have a heart capable of being touched, it should bleed at the name of Lovel!

Mel. [*Aside.*] I feel excessively sick!

Sir Ch. [*Aside.*] Egad, I think I should make an excellent actor!

Mel. [*Aside.*] Ha! my gentleman—I see you.—Is it possible! poor Lovel! Well, I shall never forget him—he was really a remarkably well made young man, and considering how men go, sensible enough.

Sir Ch. What! so cool!

Mel. Indeed, I feel for him extremely.—Here, Flutter, take my things and bring me a smelling-bottle.—I assure you nothing has shock'd me so much for a long time, and I think out of respect to the poor young man's memory, I can't do less than go into mourning.

Sir Ch. Oh! curse your respect! hang me, if I don't disclaim you.

Enter CANKER.

Can. So, Sir Rake, fine doings, I hear.—You're made free of the City of Westminster.

Sir Ch. [*Aside.*] What the deuce shall I do with Lovel?

Can. We shall have an association formed by all married men to defend their wives against you.—You'll not be suffered to live, for if revenge spares you, your rakishness will cut you off.—Ay! ay!—Young fellows now-a-days are mere flashes in the pan.—Not as they were formerly.—Look at me, scapegrace, look at me.—Will you shew such a pair of legs at my age?—Such a robust, hearty person? Such a strong—hem! hem! clear voice? such a—

Enter LOVEL.

Lovel. So, at last I am free.

Sir Chas. Whew!

Canker. Eh!

Melissa. Oh! lud! oh, lud! a ghost! a ghost!

Canker. A ghost, eh?

Melissa. Pray, guardy, don't go near it. It will certainly do you a mischief. —

Sir Chas. Toll de roll, toll de roll—

Canker. I would fain see that — really, a very fashionable ghost—drest to the life.—Sir, your most obedient—if it be not impertinent—pray, what the devil have you to do here?

Lovel. Why, Sir, upon my word, I'm afraid—nothing at all.

Sir Chas. Faith, Ned, I think it too.—To say the truth, I should now be sorry to find you had—the hand of a coquette is an evil I heartily wish you free from, and I trust you have too much sense and spirit to regret its loss.

Canker. So, Sir Rake, you are at the bottom of this.

Lovel. Sir Charles, Sir, is my friend.

Melissa. That is plain enough from the advice he has just given.

Sir Chas. Come, Ned, no longer waste your thought upon thoughtlessness—shake off your chains, and hang them up as a votive example to lovers—coquetry has had an ovation, let her not have a complete triumph, and drag you through life in lingering torment. Fly while you may.

Canker. Ay, ay! fly while you may—or, egad, I'll send for a constable immediately.

Lovel. Sir, though death were before me, I would speak.—I have here set my soul, here center-

ed every hope, and I cannot so easily alienate the passion I feel.—Miss Wilding, will you pardon me the presumption, but I have never seriously felt the varieties of your manner as indicating your real disposition ;—no, if you inflicted pangs, the pain sprung from my own morbid feelings, which, chafed into soreness by an impatient spirit, could not bear the least ruffle.

Sir Chas. Ay ! love is a rare logician.

Canker. Lookye, Mister — I'll not have any young puppy, that can collect a parcel of play speeches, come here to utter them.—Sir, this house is my own, and this lady is my ward, and cannot marry without my permission.—So, Sir, I have to beg the favor of you to walk out of my house, and I'll take care this shall be the last time you shall insult either me or my ward in it.

Melissa. Stay, Sir—my happiness is not to be sacrificed to caprice or misrepresentation — Mr. Lovel's generous ardor demands, at least, an acknowledgement.

Canker. How now, hussey ! before my face too !—

Melissa. Harkee, guardy—(*whispers*)—do you know one Mr. Higgins ?

Canker. Eh ! eh !—

Melissa. " Hush, hush, we shall be overheard —one can't be too cautious now-a-days." — In a word, Sir, I know all—it was I who met you last night,—I can be secret if *you* please — you understand me ?

Canker. Confound the jade !

Melissa. I am not ashamed, Mr. Lovel, to declare that I am far from being insensible to your merit, and if my good guardy would but consent—

Canker. Well, well, throw yourself away if you please.

Lovel. This is magic.

Sir Chas. Yes, yes; she has been dealing with the *old* gentleman!

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. Sir, here is one Mr. Clinch, who enquires for—

Enter CLINCH.

Clinch. Ah, Sir Charles, your most obedient very humble servant.—What Lovel!—my walking segar!—Madam, I would ask ten thousand pardons, but being rather out of breath, perhaps you will excuse my expressing them. Not being a man of *landed* property accounts for my want of *manners.*

Canker. What punning puppy is this?

Clinch. Sir, your most obsequious very humble servant.

Canker. Sir, I can't say I know any thing about you.

Clinch. Eh!—sure I should know that voice!—what, my old friend, Mr. Higgins!

Canker. Eh! eh!—what?—

Clinch. Ha! ha! "bless us, to see how things come out."—

Canker. What the devil!—Zounds, Sir, what do you mean?

Clinch. Excuse me—"one can't be too cautious now-a-days"—Ha! ha! Sir Charles—the rarest piece of fun that ever you heard.—

Canker. Oh, curse the fellow!

Sir Chas. This is beyond my comprehension!

Clinch. Ay, a *league* beyond it.

Melissa. How can he have found this out?

Enter SERGE, FLAW, *and* MRS. BEAUMONT.

Canker. What the devil!

Sir Chas. Heyday! what hoax is this?

Serge. Sir, your servant—*(To Canker)*—Your name is Canker, I believe?

Flaw. Stop, Sir, if you please — allow me to cross-examine. We must proceed with a due regard to legal consequences. Hem! pray, Sir, is your name Canker?

Canker. Pray, Sir, what's that to you?

Flaw. Um! an eel!—that, Sir, will appear in due course.

Serge. Sir, the fact is, I am *told* you have been playing the fool to my niece here.

Flaw. Be careful, Sir, if you please, what you admit. I have known many a cause lost for want of caution.

Canker. [*Aside.*] I'm undone!

Mrs. B. Yes, Sir, through you I have been foully scandalized. I weakly suffered your improper conduct to pass unnoticed. My folly and my silence have given a licence to a scandal, which now openly assails me—and I come now to claim from you the restitution of a character you have tended to asperse.

Sir Ch. My turn next.

Canker. I protest, Madam, I am so astonished at your strange address, I scarce know what to answer.

Clinch. Well, then I'll do it for you. Egad, Madam, you don't treat Mr. Higgins like one of the *fair* sex. You forget what passed last night.

Flaw. So, so. Might I be favoured with your name, Sir? You seem to know something of the

matter, and I shall be under the necessity to subpœna you.

Melissa. I believe, good folks, I am a more material witness than any of you.

Canker. [*Aside.*] I'm blown, and had better get out of the way. *(Slips off.)*

Meliss. In short, it was I who met Mr. Canker last night at the masquerade.

Flaw. That's not the point at issue.

Clinch. Heyday! Mr. Higgins, to shew he knows something of the law, has given us a *sett-off.*

Flaw. Sir Charles Wilding, pray do you know this hand-writing.

Sir Chas. Perfectly.

Flaw. There, gentlemen, you hear—you hear—he deposes to his own writing.

Sir Chas. Sir, I deny it.

Flaw. You hear, shuffling—take particular notice, if you please—affirms and denies in a breath.

Sir Chas. Why, you rascal, what do you mean?

Flaw. Allow me to observe, Sir, you are perhaps not aware of the consequence of calling an attorney a rascal.—I wish to let this gentleman know that the law never suffers its members to be insulted with impunity.

Sir Chas. Look'ye, Mr. Six-and-eight pence—if I am warm, my situation sanctions it.—I have lost a character almost as good as new, and which would have done very well for London wear; but I begin to perceive how the accident happened—

Flaw. Pray, Sir, what testimony do you mean to abide by?

Serge. Sir, this is an affair that concerns me nearly, and, as it would appear, you likewise. Permit me to ask, are the letters written by you or not?

Sir Chas. Not—they are Canker's hand.

Melissa. As I can affirm.

Serge. Heaven be praised!

[*Walks up with Mrs. Beaumont.*

Melissa. But soft—I see the clouds are breaking, there is one to whom the sun-beam of truth would be peculiarly cheering, and she must not be absent. [*Exit.*

Flaw. I am afraid this will turn out a bad business. Sir Charles, I begin to be satisfied of your innocence, and I am afraid there is a design against you.—Observe, I only act in this business as a professional character, and, as it now appears suspicious, I wash my hands of it. The best thing you can do, is to commence an action immediately against Mr. Beaumont for a conspiracy, and if you are not engaged, I shall feel proud in conducting the matter.

Clinch. Ha! ha! bravo, Mr. Latitat—no bad motion—egad, I think we are playing *loo*, for the knave seems the best in the house.

Sir Chas. Sir, I thank you, and if I do bring the action you advise, I shall certainly employ such an able lawyer.—But, I prefer summary justice, and will settle with him in a moment.

Clinch. Egad, I think you had better take a *second!* But, by the bye, that puts me in mind I can shew cause against the motion, for Beaumont, I hear, has dispatched himself on an embassy to the Catabaws.—

——————"Are not their woods
More free from peril than the envious court?"

Enter MELISSA *bringing in* LAURA.

Mel. Nay, but my dear, you must—

Sir Chas. Will you deny me the gratification of listening to my exculpation?—I trust, I shall now be able to efface those impressions which my volatility has imprinted.

Laura. Indeed, Sir, I—I—

Mel. Enough—the sympathetic idea is already caught, and you may both spare yourselves the pain of confession.—

Lovel. I have been a silent spectator—

Mel. What are *you* beginning?

Lovel. A life of happiness [*kissing her hand*].

Clinch. That puts me in mind—

Sir Chas. Faith, so it does, that I should ask pardon of this lady, for the distress I have been one of the causes of producing.

Mrs. B. Sir—I—I am sensible of your politeness, but am made miserable for life—

Serge. Fie! fie! Lucy.—

Mrs. B. Alas, Sir! the story is current, and I bear all the odium of its truth! How can I appear again? how can I bear the sneers of my acquaintance, and the neglect of my friends! Unhappy, wretched woman that I am.—I shall not be able to appear again the whole winter!

Serge. Come, come, compose yourself—forget such follies, and the fools that prize them—with me you shall find a home,—and a friend that will cherish you when the world forsakes you, and whose esteem will rise in proportion to its neglect.

Lovel. These little trials are but the preparative bitters of life, which give us a keener relish for its

sweets ;—the most beautiful flowers spring from the most unseemly seeds.—

Thus on Sicilian plains the torrent fire,
That rolls from Etna's mount, destruction dire,
Fraught with a fertilizing pow'r, soon yields
Far richer harvests and more verdant fields.

FINIS.

EPILOGUE.

SPOKEN BY MRS. H. JOHNSTON.

Ladies and Gentlemen—we're in sad plight—
I was to speak an Epilogue to night ;
But now, instead, I merely come to say
Our Author has not got one for his play.
He came this morning and in doleful whine—
" Madam,"—said he,—" I cannot write a line."
" Not write, Sir !—but you must, here's pen and paper—
So pray sit down and snuff your mental taper."
" Inspired by you, sweet Madam,"—" Sir, your humble"—
So down he sat an Epilogue to fumble.
Awhile he bit his nails and scratch'd his head,
Then starting up in pompous tone he read—
" How chang'd the Comic Muse—no longer gay
With pomp of plumes and fancy's rich array,
Shed are her painted wings and in their 'stead
Dun heavy pinions fold her sullen head."—
" Oh ! Lord, Sir, this will never do "—I said—
" To catch the crowd, load not your nets with lead.
No, Sir, whene'er an Epilogue you write,
Remember this, it always should be light.
When the pit rumbles and the gall'ries roar,
While loud and thick a storm of hisses pour,
An Epilogue, like life-boat, comes to save
The struggling drama from the 'whelming wave ;
Let it be only ballasted with whim—
The lighter 'tis, the better it will swim.
Some *oily words* you first must duly pour
Upon the pit, to calm its angry roar.
Then, when a calm ensues, commence a railor,
With all the boasted bluntness of a sailor.
Rail at your brother bards and cry them down
As impudent impostors on the Town ;
Who think with *clatt'ring chorusses* to please
And *gather audiences* as some do *bees.*
Touch on the leading follies that prevail—
The gossip stories of the Town retail—
Sprinkled with puns and stor'd with proverb wit ;
Such are the Epilogues that please the pit."
All this I told him, but I spoke in vain,
The fear of *you* had paraliz'd his brain.
In short we have no Epilogue, but pray
Let not *that* circumstance condemn the play,
Give a mild *verdict,* that you mayn't bestow it
But in due form, I *charge* you—save the poet.

Printed by Cox and Baylis, Great Queen Street,
Lincoln's-Inn-Fields.

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: April 2009

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